

NO 157.

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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY WEEKLY. EVERY WEEK.

DICK DARESOME'S LOST CAUSE, OR, QUEERED BY HIS BELLEVILLE RIVAL.

By FRANK FORREST.



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DICK DARESOME'S LOST CAUSE

OR,

QUEERED BY HIS BELLEVILLE RIVAL

By **FRANK FORREST**

CHAPTER I.

DARESOME IN DEEP WATER.

"Yes, I say it again—that fellow Dick Daresome is a sneak, and I would be willing to bet that he is the thief in this very case!" cried a strident voice.

"You low cur, you are lying and you know it!" came back a retort, and instantly there was the sound of a scuffling match.

The noise was heard inside the doorway of the Girls' Academy, on Greenvale Island, and the Irish maid, Mary, who saw what was going on outside the entrance of the dormitory building, set up a terrible howl of alarm.

"Murderr!" she screamed in tones which brought twenty screaming girls down the stairway of the building to see the cause of the disturbance.

The sight that met their eyes was that of Stuart Armstrong a Belleville Academy student, and Sam Thorpe, from the rival institution, Merrivale.

As the reader doubtless knows, it was the latter institution which Dick Daresome attended, and naturally his defender was this same Sam Thorpe, who was his roommate.

The taller of the two, with dark hair and eyes, and a cruel yet clever face, was Armstrong.

This fellow, seeing the commotion he had stirred up at the very portal of the girls' dormitory, straightened up.

"There, you see what you've done by your attack on me, Sam Thorpe," said Armstrong to the other. "I won't take the blame for this business, and don't you forget it. Wait till Mrs. Ferguson comes."

The latter personage, who was the preceptress of the girls' institution, made her appearance at this very instant, in high dudgeon.

"What does this disgusting clamor and outcry mean, young ladies?" cried the worthy woman, whose chief aim in life was to keep the girls of the school in order.

They were a splendid lot, but even she had a hard time of it some times. Particularly was this so because of the bitter rivalry between the two boys' academies, located at equal distances from her institution.

The youths of the two big schools, which numbered about two hundred students each, lost no opportunity to best each other in every possible way.

It was only by strict ruling that no rough work should go on in the presence of the academy girls that order was maintained on the Island.

The infraction of that rule meant that the disturbers were to be banned from the company of the young ladies.

So the reader can readily see why Stuart Armstrong was so anxious to blame Sam Thorpe with the beginning of the fracas in the present instance.

"What is this disturbance?" demanded Mrs. Ferguson,

again, with more show of temper, for her first question had remained unanswered.

"It is this ill-bred Merrivale fellow, Mrs. Ferguson," glibly replied Stuart Armstrong. "He insulted me, right here on the steps of the dormitory building, as I was coming to see you on an important matter. Then not content with that, he attacked me brutally. I don't think that you would expect me to stand here and be brutally beaten by a rowdy like this fellow, now, would you?"

The good lady gazed from one to the other in undisguised amazement. She was not as used to the wiles of clever school boys, having a general idea that youths of the opposite sex were more or less fools, anyway.

This sudden and plausible explanation completely took her off her guard.

Yet, she had always liked Sam Thorpe, who had done many kind things for her and for the girls.

"What was the truth of this, Mary?" said she, finally.

"Faith, mum, an' Oi don't know," said the girl. "They was clawin' at each other loike Kilkenny cats, and Oi was that scared, mum, Oi hardly knowed which was on top."

"Well, Sam Thorpe, what do you say?" asked Mrs. Ferguson, willing to give Dick's roommate a chance to clear himself.

"I have very little to say, Mrs. Ferguson," said Sam, manfully. "This fellow here is so jealous of Dick Daresome that he does everything in his power to harm him. Just now his attack is on Dick Daresome's good name!"

The old lady batted her eyes and gazed at Sam in surprise, fixing her spectacles more firmly in position, that she might get a better look.

"I don't understand what such talk has to do with the case," she remarked.

"It hasn't anything, Mrs. Ferguson," interrupted Stuart Armstrong. "I've come to see you on something very important, and I wish you'd let me have a few minutes of your time."

"Very well, Mr. Armstrong," said she. "Just step inside the reception hall, and into the parlor. I will be there in a minute. I wish to talk to Mr. Thorpe."

With a smile of triumph, Armstrong sauntered through the throng of girls at the entrance and into the deserted parlor. This was just the opportunity he had been looking for.

No one was in sight.

With the quickness of a cat, he slipped an object from his inside coat pocket quickly into the drawer of a table at the side of the room.

He slammed the drawer quickly shut, and the smile broadened on his face.

"Well, this couldn't be happening better if I had been planning for a month. I found that purse on the steps outside in the grass. It's the one they think is stolen, and I

have the matter cinched, for Daresome is due over here this afternoon."

Such were the thoughts that coursed through Armstrong's mind.

Meanwhile, the old lady was lecturing Sam Thorpe sternly and to the point.

"You cannot come around this Academy to see any of the girls after such actions, Mr. Thorpe," said she. "You must confine your vulgar fights to other sections than this Island, or else pay the penalty."

Sam raised up his hand for an objection.

But the preceptress would hear no more. She had made up her mind, and such idle things as facts could not influence her mind at all.

This particular trait of mind is what some vulgar, rude men say is characteristic of most women, and they declare that it is the chief reason why women should not have votes!

Be that as it may, the old lady, after having tried Sam, and found him guilty in the first degree, flounced about and marched into the hall.

As she did so, a pretty girl slipped out of the entrance and joined Sam, the two of them disappearing with merry smiles around the corner of the building for a little walk.

"Grace, wasn't that the limit?" cried Sam, as soon as they were out of earshot.

"It was, indeed, Sam," replied the girl, who was Sam's "bestest best," as the reader could have judged if he had seen the soft glances she gave Dick's roommate.

"Well, you know what the row was, don't you?" asked Sam.

"No, I can't say that I do," responded the girl, shaking her pretty head. "But I suppose it had something to do with Bess Morrison. That little roommate of mine causes more trouble between Belleville and Merrivale Academies than all the rest of us girls put together."

"I am not so sure of that," said Sam, loyally, as he looked at the sweet face before him. "But she does cause a lot of ructions, that is certainly true. This business was because Armstrong called Dick Daresome a thief!"

The girl stopped in indignant surprise.

"Why, Sam—how terrible!—I don't blame you getting angry. What did he mean?"

"He tries to blame this missing purse on Dick Daresome. You know, Dick was over here last night to that dance, and Armstrong was sore because Dick had most of Bess Morrison's dances!"

"Yes, I know that," said Grace. "But I know that Dick had nothing to do whatever with Mrs. Ferguson's missing purse."

"Of course not!" exclaimed Thorpe. "The old dame has lost it some place and she hasn't got gumption enough to admit that it's her own carelessness. When some women

get along in years their chief pleasure in life seems to be to think they've been robbed or are going to be robbed by some horrid man!"

Grace laughed at Sam's earnestness.

"Goodness!" said Grace. "A person would suppose that you were a confirmed old bachelor and woman-hater to listen to this talk. But, what connection can Armstrong put between Dick and the missing purse?"

Sam shook his head in a puzzled fashion.

"That's what perplexes me," said the lad. "There is something more to this than mere talk. You know, he is always plotting against Dick. He has tried ducking and kidnapping and hazing and fist fights. But none of them have worked—Dick has been too clever!"

"Yes," said Grace, admiringly, "and Dick has had a mighty good second in you to help him fight against the trickery of the other school fellows!"

Sam made a gesture with his hand as if to brush aside such a compliment.

"No one could help being game who had to associate with Dick, for he is afraid of nothing. But, you know the charge of dishonesty is one which is easy to give and hard to prove. Armstrong evidently had some sort of trick up his sleeve to connect Dick with this very deed."

Grace looked startled.

"Why, Sam, that might cause Dick to be expelled in disgrace from Merrivale. That would break his widowed mother's heart, you know!"

"It would break Dick's heart as well, for he cares more for honor than almost anything in the world. Dick has a lot of old-fashioned ideas like that which don't seem to have any interest at all for such fellows as Stuart Armstrong!"

"Well, what can we do, then?" inquired Grace.

"You simply go inside the house and keep a sharp watch on Master Armstrong," said Sam. "Dick is due over here this afternoon—Armstrong heard him make the date with Bess, and so that is probably why he is here."

"I will go right in now, through the rear entrance," said Grace. "You just be sure that I will watch him every minute possible."

"Well, good-bye, then," said Sam. "I'm an outlaw now, as far as the Academy is concerned. But I guess that when there is need for some real live work to be done in anything that is unpleasant or dangerous, I'll get another chance."

"Good-bye," said Grace, as she slipped into the maid's entrance of the dormitory.

Sam hustled down toward the bridge which he knew Dick Daresome would have to cross to reach the Island Academy. But, unfortunately, Dick had already come over and had walked around the other end of the building.

Thus, Sam was unable to tip him off as to the state of affairs.

The Island was in the middle of the Greenvale River, on one side of which, about a mile and a half from the shore, was Merrivale Academy.

On the other side was Belleville Academy. The lads guarded jealously their respective banks of the river and it fared ill with lads of either school caught by the rivals on what they considered their own particular territory.

Needless to say, Sam went for the foot bridge leading to his own side, and seeing that Dick was not in sight, strolled on across toward his own academy.

"Me, oh, my!" sighed Sam, in a worried way, as he walked along the foot bridge, gazing down into the whirling waters below. "It does look as if dark days were ahead for poor Dick Daresome. When the charge of crookedness comes into a struggle it is a great deal different from a question of simple bravery and grit!"

He looked vainly for Dick, and at last turned on toward the academy.

"I guess he has already gone to the girls' school—well, I hope he gets out of this as well as he has out of most other scrapes. But that Armstrong is a thorough-going rascal. It looks mighty dark for Dick!"

CHAPTER II.

A CUNNING ACCUSATION.

Stuart Armstrong, inside the dormitory building, walked nonchalantly into the hallway again, after slipping the mysterious object into the table drawer.

"It's better for me to be out here," thought this crafty schemer. "Then they won't think I had a chance to stack the cards as I did!"

At this instant Mrs. Ferguson marched grandly back into the corridor, and saw Armstrong waiting for her.

"What do you want of me, Mr. Stuart Armstrong?" said she. "I think you were about as guilty as Sam Thorpe and I don't believe I will let you come calling at this Academy either. This fighting is a very serious thing!"

"I have come to see you about something a great deal more serious than mere fighting," said Stuart Armstrong.

"What is it?" queried the old lady.

"It is about a matter of personal honesty," said Armstrong, with a very serious look.

"Personal honesty?" cried the old lady, losing her dignified hauteur. "Is it anything to do with the purse which was stolen last night?"

Armstrong's eyes flashed with triumph.

"Yes, Mrs. Ferguson, it is. I have called to tell you

what I know about that matter. It is a serious thing, and that is why I want to go very slowly in the case, for my motives are apt to be misunderstood."

The preceptress looked at him sharply.

"I begin to see what you are driving at," said she; "but you must remember that you will have to prove any charges you make against any one. Remember that I am just and fair, and will have the guilty punished. But I will not see any injustice done, either—so, I advise you to use discrimination."

Armstrong's face flushed.

"Do you doubt my sincerity, before I have even told you my ideas and my facts?"

The old lady shook her head.

"No, I am simply warning you that you must not try any games of equivocation and malice with me. I am open to facts, but I am not going to take any one's word against any one else without sufficient proof."

Armstrong's mouth twitched, for he was angry. Under the calm manner of the preceptress he could detect her suspicion of his plans. And the worst of it was, he knew that her suspicions were just—which was a great deal more than could be said in favor of his own plans!

"I have several matters to attend to about class reports," said Mrs. Ferguson. "It will take me perhaps about five minutes. Just sit down here in the hall, and I will be down at the end of that time. Then I will listen to all you have to say."

The preceptress went upstairs to her office, while Stuart Armstrong sat down on the bench by the door.

The girls had separated now, at the command of the preceptress, and so the corridor seemed deserted.

As a matter of fact, from the rear of the corridor a pair of sharp eyes were watching Armstrong's every motion. Bess Morrison's room mate, faithful to her promise to Sam Thorpe, was keeping the Belleville rival under close surveillance.

When Armstrong, glancing down the corridor, saw that he was all alone, his instinct for gloating over his victim asserted itself.

"I wonder if that purse is all right in the drawer there?" thought Armstrong. The more he thought about it the more he feared that maybe in the excitement he had made some mistake.

"Maybe I put it into another drawer instead of the one in that table," he muttered. "I was so excited over my opportunity that I hardly knew what I did!"

Seeing that no one was looking—for Grace Gray was hidden behind a door at the end of the hall, and peeking through the tiniest of cracks, Armstrong decided to have another look at his trap.

He slipped into the parlor, which was but a few feet away.

"Oh, ho!" thought Grace Gray; "there is something after all—so I'll just slip into the back parlor from here and have a look there!"

This she did, and from the second position of vantage she was enabled to watch every move of Stuart Armstrong, in the front of the big room.

Grace peeped through another door, and as that rear part of the room was darkened, Armstrong was oblivious to the watchful eyes.

He slipped open the drawer quickly, and took up the purse to look at it, with a smile across his face which had in it not a bit of good humor. It was the smile of a man who is at last successful in a bitter fight!

"Now, Dick Daresome!" he exclaimed, "I have you trapped at last!"

Grace Gray heard him say these words, and she smiled, too.

"Well, maybe you have and maybe you haven't," she said to herself. "We will see how much of a trap you are making for yourself, Stuart Armstrong!"

The sound of steps was heard outside on the veranda. Like a stealthy cat, Armstrong shoved the purse into the drawer again and slid out into the corridor.

As the bell clanged out he was quietly sitting on the bench or settee where Mrs. Ferguson had left him.

There he was, when Mary, the maid, came to open the door. There he was, to greet Dick Daresome, who entered!

Armstrong smirked at Daresome with a triumphant leer, but Dick merely looked at him, coldly, and then turned his head away, with no more expression than if he had been gazing at a blank wall.

"I'll make you acknowledge my presence," thought Armstrong, as he ground his teeth in hatred.

Daresome's disdainful indifference stung him more than any words could have done.

"Who is it ye are to see, Misthur Daresome?" asked Mary, with one of her jolliest smiles, for she liked the hero of Merrivale. Dick made the same impression with all servants, by his frank, kindly and respectful manner, for he respected all people who worked for an honest living, no matter how humble their toil.

"I'll give you five guesses, Mary," said Daresome, walking into the parlor, hat in hand.

"Faith, an' a little burrd tells me 'tis a young mavourneen named Bess!" said the merry maid.

"Sure, and who told ye? Ye're chatin'!" said Dick, with twinkling eyes, mimicing her rich brogue.

The girl laughed and ran up stairs for Bess.

The latter was waiting for Dick, and she started down the stairs, with her hat on, for she and Dick were to take a walk together.

As she reached the top of the stairs she met Mrs. Ferguson going in the same direction.

"Did you know that Stuart Armstrong was here, Bess?" asked the preceptress.

"No, I did not," said Bess, in surprise. "Dick has come to see me, Mrs. Ferguson, and if you don't mind I'm going to take a little walk with him. We are going to plan over that straw ride which is to be held as soon as the evenings get a little warmer."

The elderly lady smiled.

"It's a few weeks ahead of the season that you're planning, but it is all right," said she. "I am the one on whom Mr. Armstrong called this time, strangely enough!"

Bess followed the preceptress down the stairs, with a strange foreboding.

"What can Stuart Armstrong want here, I wonder?" she thought, anxiously. "What can he have to say to Mrs. Ferguson?"

But she did not have a chance to think the matter over, for she heard Armstrong's voice as he spoke in loud tones which echoed down the hallway.

"Now, Mrs. Ferguson, I have just the circumstances I have been looking for!" he cried.

"I don't understand you," said the lady.

"Dick Daresome is here—which is just what I want. Now, I cannot be said to be a back-biter—for I will make my accusations to his face!"

Armstrong's words had scarcely left his mouth when Dick sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean by using my name?" he cried, with spirit.

"Oh, ho!" sneered Armstrong. "I thought I'd make you notice me."

Then he turned to Mrs. Ferguson, and again spoke in strident tones, which drew the attention of the passing girls in the corridor.

"Now, I have Dick Daresome, face to face, and I accuse him of being the thief who stole your purse last night during that dance, Mrs. Ferguson!"

These startling words brought a cry of surprise to Daresome's lips. He stopped, looked at Armstrong in utter amazement, and then glanced at the equally startled Mrs. Ferguson.

"Why, this is ridiculous," said the good lady, clasping her hands together. "Dick Daresome would never do such a thing, I know it!"

"Oh, wouldn't he?" cried Armstrong, tauntingly. "I'll show you whether he wouldn't. I know now how he gets so much spending money to waste on the girls!"

He whirled about toward the drawer, and with his hand on its knob, turned to deliver his final trump card.

"I saw Dick Daresome take this off the coat rack last night and slip in here when we were all eating the ice

cream and cake in the dining-room. He put it into this drawer, where he could get it later. That's why he came here to-day—but I fooled him, for I've watched him like a hawk ever since he stepped into this building! Look at this!"

Armstrong snatched open the drawer with feverish haste, and drew out the purse.

"You contemptible liar—this is a low plot to ruin my good name!" cried Dick Daresome. "You have nothing there that can prove me dishonest!"

"Oh, haven't I?" cried Armstrong. "Look who's here! You are caught with the goods on this time!"

Dick's rival held the missing purse high in the air, before the astonished teacher and the Academy girls.

"I told you Daresome was trying to steal it—he is a contemptible sneak thief!" cried Armstrong.

Dick was thunderstruck!

"Oh, Dick, what does this mean?" cried Bess, breaking into tears.

"It means that I've shown up a crook!" cried Armstrong. "Here is your purse, Mrs. Ferguson!"

But he never handed it to her, for a blow on the jaw laid him low before them all!

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE BAN OF SUSPICION.

"Oh, Dick, what have you done?" cried Bess Morrison, in a frenzy of worriment, as she ran forward to view the prostrate form of Stuart Armstrong.

"I have branded a liar and a柱niator as he deserves," retorted young Daresome, with flashing eyes. He looked at his sweetheart with a softened look.

"Bess," continued Dick, "I am sorry to act like a ruffian here, but every fellow has a natural pride in his good name, and I won't stand and see any rascal attack my honor so foully and so fiendishly!"

The preceptress had at first been thunderstruck by Daresome's quick action. Now she rushed forward with angry gestures, as she pointed toward the corridor.

"Young man," cried the irate lady. "You have not only acted in an ungentlemanly way, but you have broken all the rules of this girls' academy. Leave the grounds, instantly!"

Dick looked at her with a puckered brow, but just as fearlessly as before.

"Mrs. Ferguson!" he exclaimed, "Are you giving me a square deal?"

"I wish some one would give you a life sentence!"

groaned the prostrate Armstrong, who pulled himself to a sitting posture and glared at his rival.

"Well, my honorable friend, I'll be very liable to get one for the treatment I'm going to hand out to you if I ever hear another word of these scandalous lies which you seem to think it your duty to utter."

Armstrong looked at Dick from under lowering brows of anger and utter hatred.

"You are only brave in front of women!" said he. "You know that I am too much of a gentleman to enter into a brawl before refined ladies like Mrs. Ferguson!"

The crafty fellow was playing another good point before the head teacher of the school, as he well knew. The old lady puffed out with righteous indignation, like a hen who has just saved a chick from one of her neighbors.

"Mr. Stuart Armstrong," said she, looking upon him with increasing favor, "you are indeed a gentleman of breeding and courtesy. Even though I did not consider the question of this supposed theft, I think you have acted with remarkable courtesy to me in this matter, not to strike the offender back."

Dick snorted with disgust as he snatched up his hat from the adjacent table.

"Oh, pickles!" he exclaimed, derisively. "The only reason that he didn't strike back was that he didn't have the chance. And, furthermore, I'm going to hunt him up and make a few alterations to the map of Belleville!"

"How dare you threaten me?" cried Armstrong, in a temper and anxious to make a thrilling impression with the girls and the old lady.

"Theaten you? Huh! You don't know me as well as I thought," said Dick. "I'm going away from this school because it's evident that my room is more desirable than my company. But as for you—I don't threaten. I'm simply stating a fact: I am going to give you one of the best wallopings you ever received, Stuart Armstrong!"

"Oh, Dick!" pleaded his sweetheart, "please leave before you make bad matters worse!"

The preceptress was staring at Dick with cold disdain. She now stepped forward to assert her authority in a manner which drove every bit of color from Daresome's face—leaving it white with suppressed emotion.

"Bess Morrison," said she, "I forbid your talking to this young man—he is under the stain of dishonor. You are placed here in my charge, and I will not permit you to have any communication with him at all!"

"What's that?" cried Dick, gasping with surprise; "do you put any trust in that cowardly rascal's abusive language?"

"Why, Mrs. Ferguson!" cried Bess, remonstrating against such injustice.

"You've not even given me a chance!" ejaculated Dick.

The preceptress pointed her thin finger, with emotion, to the doorway.

"Leave this room, and never come back to this school until you have cleared yourself from this terrible suspicion!"

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed the girls in the corridor, who had been watching this dramatic scene with interest, mixed with regret. For Daresome's ready courtesy and genial manners had made him a great favorite in the circle of the girls' academy, even though all his attentions were directed toward Bess Morrison, the prettiest of them all.

Dick looked about him, and then gave a piercing glance at Armstrong.

"You'll pay compound interest for this, my imaginative and artistic friend," said Dick Daresome.

Armstrong flushed, and his lips trembled, for he realized that with such a determined and righteous opponent his path of deception would be no well paved turnpike to success!

"Aw, get out of the presence of decent people, and go back to your bunch of sneaks at Merrivale!" he rasped, turning away.

"I'll hunt the sneaks," said Dick. "And I'm going to headquarters sooner than you think! But I will go to Belleville Academy to find them. I'll see you later!"

Armstrong started to say something, and then he caught the glance of disgust which Bess directed toward him.

He was shamed to silence.

Dick stalked to the door, and then turned about, to cast a parting shot at the irascible and unjust perceptress.

"You will be sorry for this ungenerous attitude, Mrs. Ferguson. I thought I had proved myself worthy of a fair show—but you show me that I was conceited and vain to expect such an unusual thing as that!"

Bess rushed after him.

"Good-bye, Dick, dear," said she, with her eyes beaming. "I am sure you can square all this, and I trust you right now, just as things stand."

Dick squeezed her little hand in both of his. Then, with a lump in his throat, he started through the crowding girls in the corridor.

"Good-bye, Mr. Daresome!"

"Good-bye, Dick!"

"You're all right, Dick!"

These were a few of the cheering words which were flung after our hero, as he strode along the well-worn path toward the foot bridge.

But Dick was lost in unhappy thoughts, and he did not even hear these evidences of his popularity with the kindly Greenvale Academy girls.

He walked along mechanically, trying vainly to solve the mystery. It was far from being a pleasant walk back to the dormitory.

"What a difference just a few hours and even a few minutes make!" mused our hero. "Here, less than an hour ago I was planning such a nice walk with Bess. Now, my name is dragged down in the mud by that scoundrel from Belleville."

At the same time the latter youth, from Belleville, was enjoying himself to the utmost.

He was smiling and beaming about him as if he had done the greatest thing in the world.

"Well, now, Mrs. Ferguson," said Armstrong, cheerfully and confident in the success of his victory, with this opportunity to finish up the carving of Dick's character, "don't you think I did a good job of detective work?"

The old lady, who had clutched her purse in the meantime, examined the contents.

"Oh, but it was clever, indeed. I had nearly two hundred dollars in there. That will mean a great deal toward my trip to Europe for this summer."

Armstrong laughed in his insinuating way.

"Yes, indeed," said he, sneeringly, "and it will mean that Dick Daresome can't get that sail boat he was bragging about, after all. I guess my pony and runabout won't be so very bad after all, will they, Bess?"

The girl gave him a stony stare.

"I am not interested in your belongings," said the little Armstrong resentfully glaring after her.

who hasn't anything pleasant to think about."

Without more words she stalked from the room, leaving Armstrong resentfully glaring after her.

There was a great tittering and laughing in the hall. Armstrong knew that the girls were laughing over his predicament, for he was the most insistent of suitors, and Bess enjoyed this snub very much indeed. She did not hide a single detail from the curious girls in the hall.

"That's the limit," said Stuart. "Well, I guess I might as well be going, Mrs. Ferguson," said he.

"Thank you for your favors this afternoon," responded Mrs. Ferguson. "I shall forbid Dick Daresome and Sam Thorpe any further admission to the Academy here as long as I am in command of the ship of state!"

Armstrong gave his rasping laugh.

"You'd better keep a sharp lookout," said he, "for they are apt to do a good deal of sneaky work from now on. I know their methods in these things!"

Then he went toward his own academy, feeling that at last he had accomplished the social undoing of Dick Daresome.

"Every coat of mail has its weak spot—I found this one!" thought Armstrong. "I suppose Bess is very tearful over the lobster just now. Well, she'll get over it and like me all the better!"

But Armstrong guessed in the wrong direction.

Instead of being tearful, at that very instant Bess was

shrieking with mirth over some news and plans that were being confided by her room mate. Armstrong was destined to a big surprise!

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED PERIL.

"Look out, Dick!" called a familiar voice, as our hero stumbled along with unseeing eyes. He was taking the path over the hill to the Academy, and Sam Thorpe, sitting on a handy fence rail, was laughing at his awkwardness.

Dick stumbled as he looked up. Sprawling on the ground, as the result of a sudden tripping from a long tree branch fallen there, Dick sat up with a rueful countenance.

"Gosh! That's about the final climax!" exclaimed our unlucky hero.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" asked Sam, with pretended ignorance.

Down in his heart he had a strong suspicion that Armstrong had turned his trick, and now he desired to have some fun with Dick before offering to help him.

"Matter!" exclaimed our young hero, with flushing face, as he picked himself up. "My reputation is lost, and everything under the sun has gone to smash and smithereens!"

"Why, Richardio Daresome!" exclaimed his room mate. "What on this big fat earth have you been doing? You haven't broken into a bank or haven't burned down an orphan asylum, or anything like that, have you, now?"

Dick glared at Sam almost angrily.

"Well, you ought to know well enough that I haven't!" he said.

"Then speak forth or forever hold your peace, my merry rascal!" said Sam, laughing uproariously at his friend's woe-begone look.

Poor Dick could see no cause for joking under the circumstances.

"Say, if you weren't such a good friend of mine," he cried, "I'd start in and vent some of my ill humor on you, for all this teasing. I tell you, Sam, that I have been disgraced and shamed before Bess and all the Academy girls."

"What was the crime?"

"The crime was merely a contemptible pretended bit of theft which Stuart Armstrong charged against me. He accuses me of having pilfered the purse of old Mrs. Ferguson. As if I would do such a thing!"

"How did he work it?" asked Sam. "I had a suspicion that it was coming, and I tried to head you off."

"You did? What can that mean?" cried Daresome, in surprise, as he brushed away the mud and dirt from his hat.

"Well, that's another story. But how did this Belleville Brain Worker trip you up? That's what I want to know."

Dick related the circumstances, as well as he knew them. Sam's smile spread wider and wider, as the details were recounted.

"Say, that's a cinch to attend to, Dick Daresome!" cried his friend. "We will get Mr Stuart Armstrong in so deep in his own toils that he won't know what hit him. Are you game to do it, now?"

"Of course I am," said Dick, with increased hope. "But I don't see how we can do anything. He has me tied to the mast with the clever circumstantial evidence which he rigged up in advance. I'm about despondent!"

"Oh, cheer up," said Sam. "You know the old motto that 'The truth crushed to earth will rise again'—well, we will give our Belleville friends a rise that will last them for some time!"

"I'll depend on your ingenuity, then," said Dick. "Maybe we both can do something. But, first, I have a scheme that will help some."

"What is it?" asked Sam.

"It is that I am going over to Belleville Academy, and give Stuart Armstrong a trouncing just for the honor and glory of Belleville that will last him a lifetime."

Sam smiled, for he saw that his few words had drawn Dick out of the slough of despond, and made him his old fighting self again.

"Good boy!" said he. "I think your plan is that of a lunatic, for you'd never have one chance in the world to work it, but still I'm glad you've decided to take an active hand."

Dick was meditative for a minute or two.

"The matter is just this way, Sam," said he. "I was completely flabbergasted at first by that sudden awful suspicion. I didn't know what to do. Now, you have given me hope again. I will retrieve myself. I will punish Armstrong by keeping my promise to lick him, and I will make old lady Ferguson apologize to me. You watch and see if I don't!"

The fighting glint was in Dick's clear eyes by this time. He looked like a different fellow from the unhappy lad who had stumbled down the path so short a time before.

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Sam. "I guess our friend stirred up a hornet's nest when he started you on the warpath. What is your plan to accomplish all these nice things?"

"I haven't them all worked out, but the first thing is that to-morrow morning I am going over to Belleville Academy, right into the grounds, and call Stuart Armstrong out of his class—either give or receive one of the hottest wallopings ever handed to any one outside of the prize ring, and then I will return to Merrivale with a happy soul!"

"Why, Dick, you are absolutely as nutty as a squirrel's

nest! How could you do such a thing? They would nab you and make a prisoner of you there, as they have so longed to do."

Daresome smiled with determination.

"No, Sam," said he. "You know, to-morrow is Founder's Day at Merrivale, and is a holiday from class work, in honor of the date of the beginning of the school, 'way back there in history. We all have to be back in the chapel to hear the principal give a lecture on it—but we have to-morrow morning free."

"Yes, I know; but—"

"Now, don't butt in with your buts and ifs. I am going to go to Belleville in disguise!" said Dick.

These astounding words made a profound impression.

"Say, Dick, I do believe you've been reading detective stories lately, instead of your class books!" said Sam, with a laugh. "What disguise?"

Daresome was very serious, however, and soon convinced his room mate of the feasibility of his plan.

"I am going to get a big false beard up in Merrivale Village, and you are going to do the same with me. Then I will get a buggy and horse from Jones, the liveryman, and we will drive down the road, across the Greenvale to Belleville."

"You certainly have your nerve with you," said Sam, amazed at the daring of the plan. "What then?"

"Well, I will be a liar for a change, and will send in a card to Stuart Armstrong's class, wherever it happens to be, and ask him to step out and see his father's lawyer on a matter of business. Then I'll start talking, and walk around the Belleville buildings until I get him out of sight of the class-rooms. Then for a little fistic celebration which will make a heavyweight championship battle look like a pillow fight!"

Sam jumped up and down with excited joy.

"Oh, but that's great!" said he. "Simply great, and I'm right with you in everything you do. Won't we turn the tables on them?"

"Yes—and speaking of tables, reminds me that we'd better be hustling up to the dining-hall and get a little to eat or we'll starve to death ourselves."

So the two friends, arm in arm, hurried to the mess-room, and Dick's appetite came back with renewed force. One would not have supposed that he had been in absolute despair so short a time before!

The evening was devoted to such hard study that even the unpleasantness of the day was forgotten.

Then the boys lost themselves in dreamland. Next morning Dick Daresome and Sam hurried to breakfast, and from there straight on to Merrivale Village, about half a mile north of the Academy.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones," said Dick, to the liveryman, when they reached his place of business.

"Hello, Daresome," said the proprietor. "I haven't seen you since that night you walloped the Bellevilles at basketball and won about two hundred dollars for me."

"Well, I'm going to do some more walloping this morning, but I guess you won't win any more than the hire of a buggy!" were Dick's words.

The livery man looked at him in surprise.

"Say, my boy, you don't need to hire anything from me—I have had you for a mascot ever since you came to Merrivale, and have won more money on you than I have at renting horses to these jays around here. So, you get a rig from me whenever you want."

Dick frowned a little.

"I am no professional, you know, Mr. Jones, and I don't like to have you betting on me as if I were a jockey. I don't approve of betting."

"That's all right, lad. We just have different opinions—I don't hunt up bets—it's simply known that I am a champion of yours, and that I'm willing to back my opinions up with spot cash. So, don't worry about that. What sort of a rig do you want, and what's your game for this morning?"

Daresome hesitated at first, for he did not want to be under obligations.

"Well, I'd rather hire it straight, for I might get some harm done to it. But my idea is simply to wear a false beard which I can rent up in the town from the old druggist who has some in stock, and then I'll go over to Belleville Academy—call out Stuart Armstrong on business, and proceed to give him some strap oil with my fists. He needs it—particularly after a trick which he did me yesterday."

The livery man chuckled grimly.

"Good boy! That smartie has a pony which he stabled here one day for a feed, and he sneaked away without paying for it. The academy over there is in another county, with the river as boundary, and so I can't collect on him through the courts because the bill is small. But you collect off his hide for me!"

The proprietor of the stable ordered a groom to prepare a swift steed, and soon the boys were riding down the village street toward the drug store.

Here Dick obtained two queer-looking black beards, which he rented for the day. The livery man had lent them two black slouch hats which had been left in the stable, and at the same time produced two old-fashioned yellow linen dusters.

When togged up in these the lads looked about sixty years old apiece and were queer-looking in the extreme. But they did not care, for they were going to have a lark, flavored with the sauce of danger.

"Git up!" said Dick to the steed, after they re-entered the buggy. They wore the queer suits, but did not don the

beards yet, for they wished to save these bits of decoration until the last part of their adventure.

Down the turnpike they drove, at a moderate pace, for they did not want to reach Belleville too soon.

Just as the road to the Greenvale River wound in a curve around a sloping hillside, suddenly the lads were startled by the appearance of a rough-looking man stepping out from behind some sumachs on the side of the road.

"Whoa, thar!" he cried, directing a business-like looking revolver at them.

Dick was about to strike his steed with the whip for greater speed.

"I won't give him a chance to stop us—I'll get away first!" he thought. But the man was of a different opinion.

"Stop whar ye are, or I'll plug ye both!" said this mysterious personage.

The Merrivale lad knew that the fellow had the drop on them, for their only weapon was the whip. That would not be of much avail against a heavy caliber revolver.

Dick pulled up on the lines quickly.

"What do you want?" he cried, testily.

"Git outen that buggy!" directed the man.

Dick stared at him, unflinchingly, and sat where he was, without an effort to move.

"Are you a hold-up man?" cried Dick.

"No, I ain't no hold-up man," said the fellow, angrily, running his hand nervously through his black beard. "But I want that buggy and hoss, and I'm going ter have them. Git out, before I wing ye!"

Dick resolutely remained in the seat, without a quiver of the muscles. It must be confessed that his heart was hitting up a higher rate of speed, however, for he saw that this rough fellow was not to be stopped by any appeal.

"I won't do it," said the gallant Merrivale leader. "I don't own this horse and it was entrusted to me, so I won't let any harm happen to it. You go get your own horse. What's your game?"

The rough fellow advanced toward the buggy side now, with an ominous click of the pistol hammer as he drew it back into readiness.

"Now, I ain't got no time ter explain ter ye what I want it fer!" he said. "I ain't got nawthin' agin ye boys, but some one in this neighborhood has it agin me. So, I'm goin' ter have that rig ter save my life with. You git out before ye're shot out of the rig, that's all!"

Dick Daresome saw the pistol aimed straight for his heart, and he knew that this unexpected peril threatened not only the undoing of his plans, but the safety of his own life and perhaps that of many others.

"That man's a desperado, and has done something wrong," said Dick to himself, through gritted teeth. "I will fool him, or die trying it!"

"Git a wiggle on!" muttered the stranger, reaching one hand for the lines as he did so.

"All right," said Daresome. "You've got the advantage of me, or else I'd never give in: It's a wonder you wouldn't pick on some one who has an equal chance with you!"

Daresome leaped nimbly to the ground then, as if to give up all resistance.

Sam was surprised at this easy yielding, for he knew that Dick's policy was to fight to the last. Yet he, too, realized the nearness of that bulky pistol.

So Sam followed Dick, and was just stepping to the ground when something unexpected happened.

The man was holding the reins with one hand, and with the other he covered Dick, and then turned his aim toward Sam, as the latter rose to leap out of the buggy.

The fellow had forgotten to notice that Dick still retained his hold on the buggy whip, even when he relinquished the lines.

Swish!

The lash of the well-made whip curled around the man's face with all the force of Dick Daresome's sinewy arms!

CHAPTER V.

THE HOLD-UP MAN HELD UP.

"Now, Sam!" cried Dick.

He said no more. Further directions were not needed, for his valiant room-mate acted with the speed and muscular strength of a tiger.

At least that was the way it seemed to the hold-up artist at the next instant.

"Whoopie!" shrieked Sam, with the regular cowboy yell, as he sprang from his perch on the buggy step straight for the throat of the assailant.

That person, half blinded, and completely cowed for a minute, had raised his pistol up in the air a few inches, while with the other hand he clawed at his smarting, lacerated face.

"That whip did the trick!" thought Dick, as he sprang for the horse's reins at the same instant.

It was quick work.

For Sam bore the would-be horse thief to the ground, and his strong grasp forced the hand containing the pistol up and backward. The man instinctively pulled the trigger, but the shot did no more harm than to plough its way into the weather-beaten wood of the nearby rail fence.

Then Sam held that hand there, while he forced the robber's head back against the none too soft ground of the turnpike.

"Hold him!" shouted Dick Daresome.

Sam did, though it was a tough proposition.

Dick was having a fearful tussle with the highly strung horse. The shot had frightened the animal, and it was doing its best to get away. But Dick hung on with the determination of a fighting bull terrier to a captured rat.

"Whoa, there!" cried our hero, as he was dragged forward a rod or so by the terrified animal.

But he managed to calm the horse, and patted the sleek neck reassuringly, so that the animal quieted down, and was led meekly to the roadside to be hitched.

It was well that Dick returned to his room mate's aid when he did, for Sam was having a time of it! The man was of the rough, squarely built type from the mountain country.

Swinging an axe and "toting" heavy burdens of all kinds had given him a wonderfully powerful set of shoulder and arm muscles.

"Quick, Dick!" yelled his friend, just as the man managed an adroit rough-and-tumble trick which rolled Sam underneath. The ruffian now straddled the Merrivale chap.

"I'll shoot ye full o' holes, drat ye!" hissed the enraged man. But this threat was not as easy to carry out as he thought, for Sam clung with desperation to the wrist of the hand which held the pistol.

The man gave a leering laugh as he reached over for the weapon, using his free hand.

"Now, I got ye!" he cried.

But his movement gave Sam an opportunity to deliver a blow from beneath which caught the rascal sharply and yet squarely on the point of the jaw.

The fellow's head sank, tremblingly, back. Dick rushed forward and pinioned the man's arms from the rear before he could have another opportunity to use that weapon.

"Now, my fine fellow," said Dick Daresome, with justifiable jubilation in his voice, "we have you the prisoner this time!"

Sam sprang to his feet.

"Get that gun from him, while I try a little Swedish movement on his arms," directed Daresome.

Sam clutched the weapon.

But the hardy fellow, despite the terrific and racking blow he had received, still stubbornly clung to his weapon, which he knew was his only hope of escape.

"I'll bust yer head!" he grunted, trying to punch Dick with a backhanded twist of his other arm.

But this was a hopeless task, for now our hero had the wrestling advantage, and he used it with judgment.

"Hurry with that gun," said Dick, and he suddenly swung one foot in front of the man, and forced all his weight at him, so that the fellow toppled over forward.

Dick fell on top of him, without losing a bit of his close grip. The fellow's arms were now at our hero's mercy, and Dick slowly brought them closer and closer together.

"Now, let that pistol loose, and I'll stop doing this," said Daresome.

"I won't!" grunted the fellow.

"All right, then, if you have a broken arm or two it's not my fault," said our hero. "I'm going to get you fixed if I have to break every blooming bone in your body. You'll see if I mean business or not!"

This speech tickled Sam, who knew that his friend was not so cruel as all that. He winked at Dick, who winked back again.

But Dick's voice was so serious, and the pinching, cracking grip on his aching elbows was so serious, too, that the man believed that our hero would keep his word.

So, he let the pistol drop, with a sigh, knowing that he was at last captured, and that freedom was not for him.

"Now, I guess that will hold you for a while!" exclaimed Sam, who grabbed up the revolver and covered the rough rascal with the weapon.

"Sam, you keep him covered and blow his head off if he moves a muscle and even tries to get up!"

Sam nodded in a most business-like way.

"You bet I will—I'll give him the whole gun full!"

Dick loosed his hold and ran to the buggy, where he took the hitching strap and hastened back to bind the man's wrists.

The fellow looked as if he would like to make a run for it even this late in the game. Yet he saw the determined set of his captors' jaws, and he knew that youthful as they were, compared to him, a bullet from their finger pressure would hurt just as much as from that of a man three times their age.

So he remained on the ground while Dick bound him securely.

"Now, up with you!" said Dick. "What shall we do with him, Sam?"

"Golly, I hadn't thought of that!" said the other. "Our buggy was not built for a picnic party—it's a tight pinch for two—let alone for three, with one of them a prisoner of war!"

"We will see," said Dick. "Now, you march straight ahead there toward that buggy!"

The prisoner did so, for he saw that all hope was up.

Just then a curious noise was carried to the ears of the three.

Dick looked at Sam in a startled manner, and Sam returned the glance. Then both gazed upon their prisoner.

His face had gone a chalky white, and he trembled with fear, that seemed to change him entirely from the strong, forceful, rough character who had accosted them so short a time before the capture.

"What is that?" cried Dick, in increasing amazement.

Far down to the right of the road there sounded with increasing murmur the sounds, which gradually distin-

guished themselves into the baying of hounds and the cries of men.

"It's—the—posse!" gasped the frightened prisoner.

"What are they after?" asked Sam.

"They're after you!" cried Dick.

"Yes—they'll lynch me!" gasped the man.

"What for?" cried Sam Thorpe. "What have you done?" The man fell to his knees.

"Oh, save me, boys!" he pleaded. "They'll be hyar in a minnit, an' my life won't be worth a dern! I'm lost now!"

"What do they want you for?" cried Dick. "Brace up and be a man and speak out like one!"

"I killed a man, and I broke jail," said the fellow. "An' now they've got bloodhounds arter me!"

Dick and Sam gazed at each other in silence for a minute. At last they were silent, but the noises came nearer and nearer.

"Well, I'm not a believer in Judge Lynch's law," said Dick, "and I'll turn you over to the proper authorities if it's not too late."

The man staggered to his feet again, with hope dawning once more.

"Now, you climb into that buggy, and you behave yourself. I will hand you over to the sheriff of Merrivale Village, and leave Sam here to send them off on the other trail."

"Dick, be careful—I wouldn't trust that fellow!" warned his roommate.

Dick snorted.

"Trust him—not so you'd notice it. Here, Sam, you tie up his ankles now with this extra strap. Give me that gun!"

Dick leaped in the buggy, with the reins in his right hand and the pistol in his left, with its muzzle pressed against the rascal's side.

"Now, us for Merrivale and justice. And, my gay buck, if you move a muscle I'll pump you full of your own bullets, and then drive back and hand you over to the posse."

"And they'll probably burn him alive when they get him!" added Sam, with twinkling eyes.

The rough prisoner was convinced that he was between the Old Nick and the deep blue sea, indeed. So he submitted to the lesser evil—for he knew death at the hands of the posse would be certain if he remained.

"Good-bye, Sam," said Dick. "I'll be back in a little while. Just sit around and wait for me."

He clucked to the game little horse, and away they went spinning up the road.

It was just in the nick of time.

For the lynchers with their bloodhounds came racing across a meadow, and the first of their numbers clambered the fence.

Sam was sitting at the roadside playing mumblety-peg with great calmness of spirit.

They looked at him sharply.

"Say, boy, did you see a feller running down this way?" asked the first man, who had a straining bloodhound in leash.

The animal bayed and pawed at the ground in a frenzied way. His sense told him that the object of the search had been walking on that very part of the road within a few minutes.

But the animal was not gifted with human speech, unfortunately for the cause of the lynchers.

So he could not refute Sam's statement.

"No," said that youth, calmly. "I haven't seen any runner. What's going on—a Marathon race?"

The man glared at him wrathfully.

"Don't give me none of your lip," said he. "I won't stand for it. Ain't you seen a crook along this road?"

"Well," said Sam, thoughtfully, while the rest of the pursuers crowded about with angry mien, "it does seem to me as if I saw a fellow with a black beard and a brown suit, carrying a pistol, who went down that road toward Belleville Village!"

"Why didn't you say so?" snapped the first speaker.

"Well, I didn't know that was the party you wanted. He didn't look any more like a crook than you fellows do—in fact, not so much. Say, what are you—a bunch of train robbers?" asked Sam, with a twinkle in his eyes.

The man shook his fist in the lad's face.

"I think yer're stringing me, and I'll bust every bone in yer body ef ye are!"

"Aw, cut out the talk, Smike!" cried one of the others in the crowd. "Come on and git after the feller. We won't git a chance ter catch him if they git him over in Belleville. We want some sport outen this, and the perlice will spile it!"

The dogs were howling and baying in a most peculiar manner about the spot where Dick had bundled the fellow into the buggy.

"Say, shore as yer born, that feller must have begun ter fly right along yere!" said one man.

"The scent stops right yere in the middle of the road!" cried another.

"Say, boy, what did yer reely see?" asked another of the posse, with less rural brutality.

Sam answered politely enough to this man.

"Well, some sort of a rig came down the road—looked like a hay wagon to me—but, of course, I don't know, 'cause I live in the city!"

"What happened then?" cried the leader of the posse, with impatience, clutching his double-barreled gun more firmly. "We'll string that feller up if we have to use a telegraph pole!"

Sam pointed down the road toward Belleville.

Then he was seized with a terrific coughing spell. Every time he started to talk he would appear to go into a spasm of coughing. The posse men glared at him, and Sam waved toward Belleville, despite his coughing.

At last they became impatient, and darted off down the road in the direction in which he pointed. With howls and barks and yells the bloodthirsty pursuers left the lad sitting alone again.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sam, whose voice had returned. "I was going to tell them that the fellow didn't go toward the village over the river. But they wouldn't wait to learn the truth."

The men disappeared around the curve in the road.

Sam laughed to himself again.

"Well, I'm glad I didn't tell them a lie—and, anyway, I saved that rascal for real legal justice. I wonder where Dick is by now?"

He gazed up the road toward Merrivale Village, and soon discerned the approaching buggy.

His roommate was all smiles as he drew up for Sam to get into the vehicle.

"Well, did you turn him over to the right people?" asked Sam.

"Yes, and they will attend to him. The sheriff is taking him down to the county seat right away on the morning train, to lock him up in the county jail."

Dick clucked to the horse and flicked the whip in the air so that the animal sped along again with increased spirit and quickness.

"What became of the posse?" asked Daresome, turning toward his roommate.

"I told them that a hay wagon took the ruffian down the road, and they are chasing after him now, toward Belleville," responded Sam, with a smile.

"But, Sam, this is not the time of year for hay wagons around this part of the country."

Sam nodded.

"That's what I thought, too, after I said it. But they were too polite to stop and argue about it!"

CHAPTER VI.

SURPRISING BELLEVILLE.

Dick Daresome and his roommate had made good use of their time and opportunities thus far on "Founder's Day."

"Well, this is not so bad for a beginning," said Sam Thorpe, as they passed over the bridge on the Greenvale River, toward their dangerous destination.

"Let's wait until we get down to real work," said Daresome.

some, with true philosophy. "You never can tell how the end of March is going to be from the first day it comes in!"

The boys now directed their horse by a winding road that Dick knew. He wished to reach the Academy from the other side of Belleville, in order that no word of his approach would reach Stuart Armstrong.

Furthermore, he did not care to get into complications with the disgruntled posse which might be still hunting along the river country.

"Hadn't we better put on our whiskers?" asked Sam, as they neared the rival institution.

"Yes, you are right!" answered his friend.

Then the two boys at once adorned themselves with the dark beards and pulled down the wide brimmed hats. With the linen dusters buttoned up as well, their appearance was entirely changed.

"Ah, ha!" said Dick, in a deep voice. "I feel like the heavy villain in an 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' performance! Now for the tragedy!"

Sam laughed as they drove into the grounds of Belleville Academy.

Fortunately for Daresome's plans, the instant of their arrival was during one of the class periods of the morning. All the students were in their different recitation and lecture rooms.

Sam pointed out the office building, and Dick drove straight for this.

"Careful now," cautioned Sam, as Dick tossed him the reins and leaped to the ground.

"You bet your tintype!" laughed Dick, in a low voice.

He hurried into the building, and knocked at the door which led into the main office of the Academy.

"Can you direct me to one of the pupils at this here school, young man?" asked Dick, in the deepest voice he could manufacture, addressing himself to a dapper little individual who leaned over a desk.

The little person whirled about. He was fifty if a day.

"I am no young man!" exclaimed the other, who felt that he had not been shown the proper amount of respect. "And this is not a school, it is an academy!"

"Well, well, well!" said Dick, enjoying the scene immensely; "who might you be?"

"I am secretary of the institution!" said the little man, throwing out his chest another inch. "What do you want? Why don't you step into the room when you are addressing questions to the secretary of the institution?"

Dick had a reason for not stepping into the room. He preferred to remain in the dimmer hallway, for fear that his disguise might be penetrated.

"I don't want to intrude on the big matters that you must be working over," said he, quietly. "All I want is to speak to Stuart Armstrong."

"What do you want to see him about?" asked the other,

a little mollified to think that the stranger thought him handling big affairs.

"His father has sent me here to confer with him. The old gentleman Armstrong is thinking of endowing Belleville Academy with fifty thousand dollars to increase the buildings and so forth, and he wants to learn what his son thinks of the matter."

Such an idea struck the little secretary with wonderful effect. It never dawned on him that the senior Armstrong would have written a letter to his son, instead of sending a man to talk it over.

He saw a great future for Belleville, and his manner now became positively servile, as Dick intended it should.

"Oh, sir, we will do all we can to help you," said the little man, very humbly. "I will send for him at once."

"Just tell me where his class is and I will go there myself, if you'll give me a card to excuse him for a talk."

The little secretary insisted on going for Armstrong in person.

"Very well, then," said Dick, in his deep voice. "Just send him to me in the shade of that big tree, where I'll be waiting with my rig. I will have to talk quickly, and then get back for the next train."

The little man nodded and hastened away. He soon called Stuart Armstrong from his class and sent him toward the two strangers, who had driven their buggy under a wide-spreading oak tree, which stood on a curve in the road, some little distance from the other buildings.

"Now, hurry, and persuade him to leave the money to our Academy by all means," said the little secretary.

Armstrong, sorely puzzled, hurried toward the distant buggy, as the secretary turned into the office again.

"I wonder what on earth this can mean," thought Armstrong, as he walked along. "Dad must be crazy—if there's going to be any money left it will be to me and not to any academy, if I have any say in it!"

He reached the buggy where the two strangers sat.

"Ah, is this Mr. Armstrong?" asked Dick, springing to the ground and advancing toward the youth.

"Yes, and who are you?" asked the lad, not at all graciously, as he came closer.

There was something very familiar about the eyes above that dark beard, and Armstrong felt a little anxiety. He was some distance from the Academy buildings, and he distrusted the two men.

"Oh, I'm the Man in the Moon," replied Dick, in his deep voice, and he could hardly restrain his mirth.

"What do you want? Are you crazy?"

"No, not at all," said Dick. "I want to talk over some things with you, and my friend and I just drove up here to see you. We've heard what a fine, honorable, brainy lad you have grown into."

"Say, what is your game, anyway?" cried Armstrong,

looking at Dick with increasing wrath. "I think you fellows are bunco-steerers!"

Daresome, looking over his shoulder, saw that no one was in sight, and that the secretary's office entrance was around the curve in the roadway, with the chapel building standing in between. So the coast was clear.

He snatched off the wig and tossed it into the buggy, where Sam deftly caught it. The coat and hat followed with rapidity.

He whirled about on the startled Stuart Armstrong, with his courageous smile.

"Now, my gay and festive leader of the Bellevilles!" cried Daresome. "You see I have you right where I want you!"

The other stood petrified for an instant in dumb amazement at the daring of his rival.

"And, you see, I've kept my promise—I have come here to give you the walloping of your sweet young life," continued Dick, with a laugh. "You don't know what you are up against now—it's not a bunch of girls and women who are easy to bluff. But, we'll see what you can do with some one your own size!"

Armstrong started backing away.

He glanced over his shoulder, and not a helper was in sight. He saw that he would have to face the music alone or be branded a coward.

"You can't scare me, Dick Daresome!" he hissed. "I hate to soil my hands with touching your sneaky, dishonest face, but you will lay hands on me at your peril!"

Dick laughed. Sam laughed, taking the beard off his own face now, for he saw that their disguises were useless.

"Well, Mr. Armstrong, just take this as a souvenir of my dishonesty—you will not say that I kept anything back from this deal."

With these words Dick sprang at Armstrong and brought a flat-handed blow across the lad's face which echoed! The red sprang to the Belleville's skin as Dick's hand withdrew. It seemed to Armstrong as if his skull had been cracked by the sudden and noisy blow.

But such was not the case.

He staggered a bit and then pulled himself together. He lunged at Dick, who laughingly leaped out of his way.

"You'll settle for this!" cried Armstrong, trying to smite our hero with a left swing.

"All right!" said Dick, and he swung in a hook jab which landed on the angle of Armstrong's jaw, on the left side.

Smack!

The Belleville leader staggered back, gasping with pain, and Dick followed it up with another blow, this one landing in the pit of his stomach.

"I guess that ought to help settle it, doesn't it, Armstrong?" teased Daresome.

The infuriated Armstrong rushed at him now in a frenzy of pain and wrath.

"You scoundrel!" he grunted, swinging wildly at Dick.

But our hero dropped to one knee with a sudden and baffling trick. Both hands were held above his head, about six inches apart, and they caught Armstrong under the chin at the same instant.

He staggered back.

Dick was up and delivering a quick and breath killing jab in the fellow's chest.

"Soak it to him, Dick," laughed Sam, enjoying this mill immensely, from his grandstand seat in the buggy.

"I'll soak him, all right," said Daresome.

Armstrong endeavored to rally against the furious onslaught. But Daresome, with righteous wrath, leaped at the befuddled Belleville with increasing strength and fury.

"This is for the lies you told yesterday at the girls' academy!" shouted Dick.

Biff!

It seemed as if Armstrong could not collect himself for a fitting resistance against his opponent.

The fellow caught the blow on the chin and sank to his knees.

"You low-down sneak thief!" he cried, in a voice of undying hatred.

Dick stood until he rose to straightened knees again, and then our hero rushed on the other with a vengeful look in his eyes.

"I'll make you eat those words!" he said, and he caught the other by the throat.

Sam was so intent that he did not see another lad approaching from the roadway behind the buggy.

This newcomer took a hurried glance at the struggling figure, and snatched up a fallen branch of a tree which lay handily near him. He advanced cautiously upon the combatants, careful to keep out of the range of Sam in the buggy.

"Will you take that back?" cried Dick, as he wrestled for an instant with the Belleville leader.

"No!" grunted Armstrong, with grim determination.

Dick whirled his weight in a queer twist, and with a quick jerk of his heels managed to bring the other to the ground with a bang.

There he rubbed his opponent's face in the mud of the road, with grim satisfaction.

"Now, will you eat your words, or eat mud, whichever you wish?" he cried, wrathfully. The word thief did not please him any more than it would have pleased any other healthy honorable youth.

Armstrong grunted for a minute as his face was rubbed back and forth in the muddy roadway.

"I take it back!" he meekly groaned, seeing that the other had the wrestling advantage of him.

Just at this instant the other Belleville, who had been slipping up on the other side of the buggy, made a quick rush upon Dick from the rear.

With the heavy piece of wood high in air he sprang upon the Merrivale youth with a cry of victory.

"Here's where you get yours, Daresome!" he yelled, and brought the stick down with all the strength in his well-developed arms.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER BRUSH WITH THE POSSE.

The cry of exultation was what spoiled his game. For in the fraction of a second between the utterance of the words and the falling of the stick, Dick realized that a new enemy was upon him.

He ducked his head down low between his shoulders.

Biff!

The blow fell with a terrible force that would have fractured his skull had it fallen where it was aimed by the venomous Belleville.

"Ouch!" grunted Dick, in spite of himself, for the blow was a painful one, which deadened his shoulder muscles for an instant.

The other fellow was upon him in a twinkling, and it was now a three-cornered struggle, with Armstrong on the bottom, Dick in the middle, and the third comer on top.

"Well, as I live!" exclaimed Sam. "That's Henry Benson, who went to Belleville after he was expelled from Merrivale!"

The sandwich of fighters, in three layers, were now struggling together.

"We've got him now!" cried Benson, exultantly.

But he reckoned without Sam Thorpe, who was always to be counted upon in time of dire need.

That lad leaped from the buggy, and in his good right hand he bore the buggy whip.

"This will show them their place," chuckled Sam Thorpe, as he rushed to the side of the struggling three.

It was going badly with Dick, for Benson, taking advantage of the temporary numbness of the lad's muscles from the cruel blow on the back, had caught his arms in a vise-like grip from the rear.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed.

Then he changed his tune with remarkable quickness.

"Wow, wow!" he wailed, just as suddenly.

For Sam brought that trusty whip across the fellow's legs with a force which bit into them in a terrific manner.

"Let go!" yelled Sam.

Benson still clung to Dick's arm, hoping that the lad

underneath could get in a little punishment. This would have happened if Sam had retired to the roadside to sit on a rock and philosophize.

But Sam did nothing of the sort.

He belabored the legs of Benson with such vigor that the youth released Dick with howls of pain, and darted away in the direction of the Belleville dormitory building.

The classes were just out at this minute, and his yells brought forth a crowd of sympathizers.

Dick meanwhile had sprung up, and Sam, in the joy of his buggy whip, wasted a few cracks upon the legs of Armstrong, who howled and kicked on the ground.

"There they are!" cried the voice of Benson, from the direction of the dormitory.

Dick pulled Sam's elbow.

"Say, Sam, we had better get a wiggle on, the whole Belleville crowd is on the warpath!"

This was indeed so, and the boys leaped into their buggy just in time.

"Get up there, Betsy Jane!" cried Sam to the horse, bringing the lash across the horse's flank, just as two Belville's laid heavy hands on the back of the buggy.

They were dragged along a few feet, trying vainly to clamber over the rear.

Dick was attending to the driving, and Sam, with the whip still in his possession, swung it around the rear, just as the reader has seen many a teamster do, when a small boy was "hooking a lift" in the rear of a wagon.

"Ouch!" yelled the two Belville's, as the whip reached both of them.

They clung no longer, and the spirited steed sprang along the road with a record-making speed.

The Belville's, howling and yelling wrathfully, were left behind in no time.

"Now, where does this road lead, Sam?" asked Dick, as they hurried along. "I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way!"

"This is running parallel with the Greenvale River, Dick," replied his roommate. "We might as well go this way, although we have to go down the river nearly four miles more before we find a bridge."

"That doesn't hurt my feelings," said Dick. Then his mind reverted to the scene they had just left. He laughed uproariously, and his friend joined in.

"Say, wasn't that a regular edition of a comic paper, Dick?" asked Sam.

"Yes, except that Henry Benson didn't use a stuffed club on my back. It feels as if it had been hit with a pile-driver," answered Daresome.

"Oh, that may be," said Sam, "but I rather guess we left the account decidedly in favor of us. Just think of what is happening there now. Think of the language!"

Dick remembered the pompous little secretary.

"Say, I'll bet that secretary has already figured out what will be done with the fifty thousand, and I guess he had given himself a raise."

The boys laughed over this, and let the little horse slow down, for they were driving by a beautiful part of the river now, and had put a safe distance between themselves and the Belleville buildings.

Suddenly three figures darted across the road.

They were armed, and at the point of guns the boys drew up in surprise.

"Why, it's part of that posse!" said Sam in a low voice, recognizing some of the rough fellows.

More men strung out into the road.

"Say, hev any of youse seen a feller runnin' down this road?" asked the first of the men. "We're after a murderer, and we're goin' ter lynch him!"

Dick looked at the fellow without a quiver.

"No, I haven't seen any one on this road. What's the excitement?"

The man looked at Dick and then he glared at Sam.

"Oh, ho! Well, if here ain't the smart lad that told us to go chasing a hay wagon! So, ho, you will monkey with the band wagon, will ye?" cried the leader.

He reached into the buggy and caught hold of Sam's arm.

"Take him out and give him a wallopin', Smike!" cried one of his comrades. "He's in cahoots with that murderer, I do believe!"

"That's ridiculous," said Sam. "Why don't you men go after your party instead of bothering innocent people on the road?"

"Let go of this horse," cried Dick. "We are not doing anything to you, and we have something better to do than to argue and scrap on this roadside!"

The man glared at Dick, and the others closed around to see what was the trouble.

"Why, I swan, what's this?" cried the leader of the posse, as he spied the false beard which was showing in the bottom of the buggy where the lap robe had been kicked aside a little.

He plucked it forth and held it up.

"A false beard, fellers," he said.

"Thar's somethin' crooked hyar," cried another.

"Them's the fellers that helped that crook bust jail," exclaimed a third.

"Let's capture 'em," cried a fourth.

It looked bad for Dick and Sam, but their stanch hearts never failed them.

"Heré, don't be so fly with other people's property," said Dick, reaching over and snatching the beard out of the man's hand. "That is our property and you keep your paws off of it!"

The fellow started back in surprise at the lad's fearless-

ness. Then he glowered at the youth and brought his heavy shotgun around in front of him.

"Say, I reckon as how yer lookin' fer trouble," said he. "We've been fooled about this yer crook hunt, and I reckon that this partner of yours is ter blame fer it. I swan, I think yer both crooks! I shore do."

Dick tightened his hold on the reins.

"Well, my friend, you need a shave, not only on your dirty ugly face but on your brain. If you made a living by what you thought you'd starve to death at the first meal-time."

"Take 'em outen that rig and wallop 'em!" cried the man nearest the leader.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Dick. "We are driving peacefully along this road, and we're not going to stand for any unfair play from any one. Those beards we were using in a student prank—we are from Merrivale Academy, and you can find us there whenever you want to inquire further."

"Drive ahead, Dick, and let's stop the arguing," said Sam to his friend.

"You bet I will. I don't like the company any more than they like us."

Dick clucked to the horse, and flicked the whip over the steed's haunches.

The animal started forward.

As it did so the leader sprang for the reins, to detain them.

"Not so fast, my fine students!" he cried. "Ye're goin' ter answer fer them wigs. I think ye helped that jailbird myself, an' if we cain't catch him we'll take it outen your hides! Won't we, mates?"

"Yes!" cried the men.

But Dick Daresome had a different opinion under that thick head of brown hair.

"Get along!" he called to the horse, bringing the whip with swinging crack on the animal's side. At the next instant he swung the whip in the reverse direction across the face of the unpleasant Smike.

Swish!

The man staggered back with a yell, and in the instant of startled surprise, while the members of the posse stood in dumb amazement, and their leader clawed at his face, the buggy with its spirited steed sprang down the road, and the two boys yelled back in defiance.

"Shoot 'em!" cried the half-blinded leader, as he pulled his gun up for a sight. But this throbbing face and eyes hurt him so that he could not aim within fifty feet of the flying vehicle and its occupants.

Bang! Bang!

He pulled both triggers and the shots rang out on the still country air.

However, our friends were uninjured, and their steed was carrying them farther and farther away all the time.

"Here, Smike!" cried one of the more sensible men of the posse, "cut out this target business. Them boys is just fresh; we don't want ter get lynched ourselves fer murder!"

The others realized that he was right.

Thus they did not fire after the retreating lads, and so the boys made their escape, while the men struggled to calm down the angered and uncomfortable Smike.

"But I tell ye they helped that murderer get away!" said Smike, not knowing how near the truth he came in reality.

"Oh, rats, Smike, let's get back fer our own homes; we won't find that man. And, anyway, there's no need of chasin' around these yere Academy boys. I knows 'em," said his friend. "They're sharper than tacks, and they're jest as uncomfortable ter set down upon!"

With which words of wisdom the posse turned back toward their own section of the country and took up the march toward their homes.

They had been foiled in their purpose by the brave lads, and it was not until a week or so afterward that they learned how the desperate mountain murderer whom they had chased had been taken from their clutches.

But the rascal was brought to justice, through the regular methods of the law, and paid the penalty with his life, as he so richly deserved.

This was some consolation to the posse, but needless to say the fingers of the jovial Smike itched to use a black-snake whip on that student whose face he never forgot. His turn came long afterward.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIFE OF A CHILD.

"We ought to frame this old buggy whip," laughed Sam, as he looked at the weapon which had served them so well on their daring trip.

"Sam, I think we'd better be getting back as soon as we can," answered Dick. "Our luck has been almost too good to be true, and there's no use in straining luck! We are apt to get it in the neck if we have another adventure!"

"You are right," said Sam. "Let's lose no time in getting to that bridge down the river, and then we'll make Maude S. and her record look like that of a canal-boat beside an ocean greyhound."

The lads wasted no time now, for the morning had passed rapidly along, and they were due back at the Academy.

The trip seemed uneventful enough now, until they crossed over the bridge afar down the river and started up on the other side for their own Academy.

As they were coming along a straight sweep of road, which gave them a fine chance for speeding, Dick let out the reins of his steed.

"Gee, but this is going some!" said he, as they seemed to fly over the smooth roadway.

"I'm glad this road is deserted," said Sam.

Just as he spoke the words an ill fate seemed to step into the game.

"Great Scott!" cried Daresome, straining his eyes ahead at a tiny object which ran into the middle of the road.

It was a little child, which had run out from a farmhouse built close by the thoroughfare.

"Dick, we'll run over the little one!" exclaimed Sam, reaching a hand instinctively toward the reins.

"No, we won't—we mustn't!" said Dick, grimly, as he stiffened his legs, bracing them against the dashboard, and drawing back on the lines with all his might.

But his horse, as spirited an animal as ever sped over country roads, had had a taste of the joyous run. It was a glorious Spring day, and the magnificent animal was full of fire and could not be curbed.

It raced on, nearer and nearer the little child, which stood in the middle of the road staring at the oncoming vehicle.

"Get out of the way!" cried Dick, but his call was in vain. It was too far away for his voice to carry, and the little one was too intent on the interesting new object which was coming closer and closer.

"Pretty, pretty!" it cried, stretching out its little arms toward the speeding buggy.

Dick and Sam were fairly sick at heart.

"Oh, Dick, this is nothing short of murder!" moaned Sam, as his heart grew colder with every forward spring of the horse.

Dick was saying nothing, only pulling with all his strength on the reins.

Closer and closer—it seemed that all was up.

Dick tried sawing from side to side, but the beautiful horse seemed to think that this maneuvering on the reins was a signal to go the faster.

It did so.

"Oh, Dick!" groaned Sam, in deepest despair, shuddering at the horror of it all.

Dick was forcing himself to think, for he could hardly even bear to look forward at the little one facing its doom so innocently.

Then an idea struck him.

The horse was barely a hundred yards away from the endangered child, which toddled forward with a gurgle of infantile glee, as it saw the nice buggy coming nearer.

"Horsey, horsey!" it cried.

Dick Daresome swung the reins into Sam's hands, and before his friend could understand his plan, without a word, our hero straightened up, leaped forward and was crawling over the back of the runaway horse.

"Steady him, Sam!" grunted Dick now, and at the same time he flung his arms about the horse's head.

The animal was startled, terrified at this weight on his back and shoulders, for he could not see.

He quivered an instant and stopped for the fraction of a second—at least he slowed up in his speed a little. This was the chance for Dick, who had seen other runaways stopped in the same method.

He swung himself daringly down off his saddle position, to hang on one side of the horse's neck.

The animal sped forward again, with renewed speed. But a great weight was dragging at the side of his neck now—the weight of Dick's whole body.

"Careful, Dick!" gasped Sam, unnerved by the daring act.

Dick answered not—he was holding on for two lives—his own and the little one's! The horse tried to shake him loose, but still he clung, his feet dragging and scraping most uncomfortably, but he was winning in the struggle.

Closer and closer they came to the little child, and at last they were within a dozen feet of the little one.

Dick tugged and wriggled, and the horse finally came to a stop.

It was snorting and fretting and plunging and rearing, for the poor beast could not understand such treatment. Still, Dick held its bit firm now, and he struggled to his feet.

His shoes were scuffed and scraped, and his knees pained him where the horse's knees had struck him furious blows more than once, yet his heart was glad.

"Golly manees!" he cried, in schoolboy jargon, to his roommate, when the horse was finally quieted. "That was the closest yet! Here, you little rascal, you'd better go in to your mother!"

"You sure did good work, Dick," said Sam, admiringly, springing out of the buggy to calm the horse and stroke the frightened animal. "Take that little one in before it gets run over in earnest!"

Dick caught up the laughing baby, and took the jolly little toddler into the farmhouse, where he found the mother churning.

"Here, ma'am," said he, with a smile, "is a little rascal I found loose in the road. He came near getting run over, and so I brought him back here for safe keeping."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said the young mother. "I never can keep real track of that little rogue, and I hope it didn't trouble you."

Dick assured her that it didn't, and then went back to

the roadway, with aching knees to remind him what a prevaricator he had been.

Sam was holding the horse, and Dick leaped into the buggy without more waste of time.

"Let's get some four-leaf clovers to feed this animal," laughed Daresome, as he took up the reins. "I think we're in bad with Mr. Luck to-day."

"I don't," said Sam. "We have him right with us."

Then they started for home once more, and again they ran into excitement. It was indeed a memorable day for the boys, and this last adventure was destined to remain with them for some time.

It was another case of last but not least!

The lads looked down the road with surprise as they saw a string of queer vehicles before them.

"What can that be?" inquired Daresome, gazing ahead with curiosity.

"It is a wild assortment of wagons," answered Sam; "all gold and red, and every other sort of color. Oh, I know what it is, after all."

Dick laughed.

"Tell us then," said he.

"It is that animal show which is billed for the Village this afternoon. I guess they are just getting on the job, Dick. They had better hurry or they won't get their tent up in time. Shall we pass them?"

Dick nodded.

"Sure, we don't wan to play trailer for a dog and monkey show, Sam."

So he clucked to the horse, which by this time had quieted down from the exciting race.

The animal sped along, and one after another of the vehicles was passed. In some were monkeys and cats and dogs, and even some parrots.

"That is quite a variety," said Dick, as they looked curiously at the different wagons and their contents. The drivers smiled and bowed pleasantly, and the boys returned the greeting.

"Well, how is the circus business?" asked Dick, as they were passing the last wagon, which was in reality first in the little procession.

"Oh, pretty slow," said the driver; "and it's no fun riding with a bunch of apes and gorillas if any one wants to ask you!"

Dick and Sam looked into the interior of the wagon, which was built like a loose cage. They could see the swaying forms of several jungle dwellers swinging back and forth inside.

"That isn't the best company in the world, it's true," said Dick. "I don't envy you."

He swung his own steed on ahead, and just as he did so there was a terrified yell from behind.

Before Dick or Sam could turn around there was a rush-

ing attack on them from the rear, and wiry-like hands were twisting about their throats.

"What on earth!" muttered Dick, as he felt the grip tightening.

"Look out, boys, some of those baboons have broken loose!" cried the driver from the wagon on the rear. Instantly there was an uproar.

The baboons had indeed become free in some manner known only to themselves. Maybe in their queer, crafty intelligence they had worked the door of their wagon cage free in some way, and took advantage of the inattention of the driver.

However it was, they leaped over the backs of the horses into the vehicle which bore Dick and Sam.

The hairy hands tightened their grip, and one baboon, almost as large as a man, swung around in front of the vehicle, and clawed at the horse with its sharp nails.

The animal leaped forward before Dick could do anything.

That lad was himself struggling with the monstrous animal which had his throat in its vise-like grip.

"Sam, we're lost!" muttered Dick.

The two boys struggled with the two animals which for some mysterious reason had attacked them so desperately.

The claws were used again and again on the faces and arms of the lads as they struck at the vicious, hideous heads. Their skin was pinched in the cruel grasp of the animals in a way which left bruises for many days.

To cap the climax the terrified horses sprang forward with a shrill whinny.

"This is awful!" gasped Sam, as he struck at the gibbering baboon which clung to his neck.

He managed to deliver a blow which taught the animal a little lesson, and then Sam tried the neck method himself. He caught the brute by the throat, pulled it around to the side of the buggy, and stuck its head down against the whirring wheel.

"That'll do for you," thought Sam, and he was right. The spinning iron rim ground into the skin of the simian, which caused that enterprising animal to let forth a yell which made the echoes ring.

The animal loosened his grip on Sam's body, and the lad gave the brute a scientific jab down between the wheel and the side of the buggy.

Sam loosened his hold, and the monkey fell beneath the vehicle, which soon passed over him, and left him gibbering to himself in the middle of the road.

All this time the buggy was being borne madly along by the terrified horse, which was being tormented by the baboon sitting astride him, as it had been taught to do in the animal circus.

Dick was struggling with his hairy assailant, and yet by

grim determination managing to hold onto the lines of his running steed.

Sam whirled to his friend's aid.

His assistance was most timely, for in another minute Dick's eyesight might have paid the penalty. The simian was clawing at his face with maniacal fury.

"Oh, Dick, this is fierce!" cried Sam.

The lad's fingers tightened about the throat of the baboon, and by main force Sam dragged the brute away from his roommate.

Dick now reached forward and with a lightning-like movement brought the whip into a reverse position.

He used the handle for a club, and the heavy stock came against the baboon's head, while Sam struggled with the animal.

"Yeoww!" screeched the baboon.

The whip did its work, for the blow acted as well as a dose of chloroform would have done.

The baboon sank back limply in Sam's grasp, and the lad tossed the animal over the side of the buggy with no compunction.

"Dick, we must fix that other one!" cried Sam. "He'll kill that horse."

The brute in front was indeed torturing the poor steed, and pulling the horse's long mane in a cruel manner, which caused the poor animal to speed faster and faster.

The buggy was swinging from side to side of the road.

Ahead of them Dick and Sam saw a herd of horses and ponies, which they correctly judged belonged to the animal show as well.

If they were to run into these animals all would be lost. Dick knew that desperate action was necessary, and yet he knew that he could not hope to win in a hand-to-hand fight with the great baboon on the horse's back.

"Here, hold the reins, Sam!"

The lad then swung the whip with all his might, bringing it across the head of the cruel simian.

The baboon whirled about in its position as if to spring back at its assailant.

Just at this instant Dick brought a downward blow of the whip handle, which finished the work.

The animal rolled off the horse's back, limp as a dead jack rabbit.

"Whoa!" cried Sam, soothingly, to the horse.

The frightened steed was drawn up slower and slower, for the animal knew that its cruel rider had somehow or other been removed from its back.

The boys stopped their rig as they reached the trick ponies and the horses with which they had so nearly collided.

"Say," yelled Dick, "you fellows had better look out for three wild baboons which are broken loose back there! They won't do a thing to your ponies if they get on them."

"Oh, the keepers will fix those baboons all right," said one of the drivers. "They get loose every now and then, but we always capture them again."

Sam shook his head.

"Say, I don't care to be a showman if that is part of the job."

"Boys, it ain't nawthing to what the doings is in a real circus; you ought to see it when some of the panthers gets loose!" said another man.

"Great Scott!" said Dick, "let's get out of this. Maybe they have a few panthers concealed in some of those cages back there for unwary travelers. My throat won't stand much more excitement."

He laughed rather ruefully as he felt his bruised and lacerated skin.

"I should say so," said Sam. "No more animal shows for your Uncle Dudley!"

The lads started their long-suffering horse again, and hurried on past the slow-moving ponies, which jogged along at an even gait.

"I wonder if they captured those baboons," said Dick. "Anyway, that show doesn't appeal to me. You won't see Dick Daresome in a reserved or any other seat at that performance. I'll spend my money in arnica and witch hazel."

"Me, too, Pete," said Sam, as they sped on toward the Academy. "I never understood what they meant by monkeying around. This particular job of monkeying will give me more nightmares than all the mince pie a fellow could eat in a month."

The Academy buildings came into view at this juncture, and the reader may guess how glad the boys were to see this welcome, peaceful sight.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE RUMOR.

As Dick and Sam drove into the campus of the Academy, they saw the lads of the school walking toward the chapel.

"What's doing?" asked Sam, in wonderment.

"You have forgotten that this is Founder's Day," said Dick, "and the boys are all going to hear the principal's lecture on the history of Merrivale."

"That's so," said Sam. "Let's hustle up so we can get in there, too, for that's the cause of our holiday."

They hitched the team, and as they did so several of the students passed them.

"I wonder where Daresome got the rig?" came a snarling voice.

"Oh, I guess he can afford a good deal in the line of sporting since he has taken to lifting pocket-books," answered one of the others, in a voice intended for Dick's ears.

Our hero whirled about to hear the laughs of the speakers.

"What was that he said, Sam?" asked Dick, his face going white with wrath. Yet he wanted to be sure of his ground.

Sam shook his head.

"Fiddlesticks, Dick," said he. "That was just some of the loose-lipped talk of that Herron crowd. It was Percy Herron and Nash Clayton and the rest of those fellows who are so envious of you. They are a disgrace to Merrivale Academy!"

But Dick was not to be quieted with this scornful opinion.

"I'm going to see what they meant by that remark!" cried he, as he hitched the horse in the shade. "I won't stand for insults even from that worthless source!"

He hurried after the group of his fellow students who had always been so bitterly opposed to him, through their own malicious envy and jealousy.

They were a small proportion of the two hundred students of Merrivale Academy. Yet they were large enough in number and unprincipled enough in their actions to cause Dick some very uncomfortable moments at times.

Thus far he had always bested them.

But this time he had been touched on a tender spot, and he boiled with rage. The group of students hurried away when they saw him coming and took shelter in the chapel.

Dick saw that he could not say anything to them without interfering with the meeting.

"I'll bet that sneak of an Armstrong has sent word over here to some of these fellows about that business yesterday at the Academy for Girls!" thought Dick, angrily.

He sat down in an empty seat, near one of his friends, Chester Brown, the lame lad.

He saw that all the students near him gazed at him with troubled expression, at least those of his friends did, while the Herron-Clayton faction could hardly contain some evident mirth.

"I wonder if it is that affair about the pocket-book?" thought Dick, miserably.

But the principal had stepped to the front of the chapel, and rising to the platform began his talk on the founding of Merrivale.

He spoke of the honored graduates of the fine old Academy and the wonderful work it had done. But all these interesting things were lost on Dick.

He could only see the insinuating, sneering expressions of his envious schoolmates, and the questioning glances of the lads who were his friends.

Finally Chester Brown scribbled a note on an envelope back and passed it over

It said:

"Dear Dick: What is the meaning of this story going the rounds of the Academy about your being caught in some mix-up at the girls' school yesterday? Chester."

Dick scribbled back:

"I can explain all, but who started the story?"

When Chester read the answer he pondered for a minute, shook his head as if uncertain. Then he spied the laughing expression of the envious Percy Herron.

He was as certain as if he had heard the fellow's words, and he gave Dick a meaning nod in the direction of the conspirators.

Dick's eyes flashed ominously, with that same queer look which one sees on the face of a quiet man about to do a desperate deed.

"I see where there will be something doing to end up the Founder's Day celebration," thought Chester to himself, for he knew Dick's manner of action exactly.

Daresome spent the hour during the exercises in an agony of uneasiness and restless anger.

"If I could only do something," he thought, "it would be all right! But here I've got to sit still and let them laugh at me."

At last the period came to an end, and Dick Daresome had his chance.

The boys filed out of the building. Dick hastened to the doorway and waited under the broad old elm tree near the entrance. As Percy Herron came along, with a satisfied sneer, Dick stepped into the path.

"Say, Herron," said he, "I thought I heard you addressing some very witty remarks to me when I was hitching that buggy."

Herron laughed insolently.

"Huh!" said he. "You spend your time listening to what other people are talking about, do you? Well, you take my advice and don't be such a rubber-neck or you are apt to hear something you won't like. I understand that you are talked about quite enough to satisfy even such a show-off as you!"

"What do you mean?" cried Dick Daresome.

"Oh, I guess you'll find out; but please don't talk to me too long, or someone might think I was in on the swag. You know I have a reputation to maintain, and I don't like to be seen too intimate with sneak thieves!"

The others of Herron's crowd were standing around with expansive smiles on their faces. Other Merrivale lads were crowding about within earshot.

It was evident that this matter had been the cause of much interested conversation during Dick Daresome's absence from the Academy.

"You insinuating liar!" cried Dick Daresome. "What do you mean?"

Herron's face reddened at this frank insult.

"See here, you can't call me every name in the list, Dick Daresome!" he cried. "I know what I'm talking about this time. And every fellow in the Academy knows it, too—that you are blacklisted from the Girls' Academy for stealing Mrs. Ferguson's purse!"

Daresome's breath came in a gasp, so fierce and uncontrollable was his rage, for an instant.

Herron noted his queer expression.

"There, fellows," he cried in the very zenith, as he supposed, of his victory over Daresome. "You see the acknowledgment of his guilt in his own face! Wait until the principal gets through with Daresome!"

His friends raised their voices in a jeer.

Sam Thorpe, standing nearby, started forward, in a towering rage. But Dick thrust him back roughly.

"Let me attend to this," said he. "This is my matter, and I'll settle it right now."

His voice was so husky and hoarse with passion that his roommate hardly recognized it. He stood open-eyed as he saw his friend step forward toward Herron.

That youth had already turned to go on with his friends, confident that he had forever shamed Dick Daresome before the students.

"I guess we won that time!" he was saying to Nash Clayton, when Dick's vise-like grip closed on his arm. He was dragged around, facing Daresome, much to his own surprise.

Dick's eyes, with a burning light in them which seemed almost to give out sparks, came very close to the shifty eyes of Herron.

"So, my fly-tongued fellow student, I am all the talk of Merrivale, am I?" asked Dick, in even tones, which showed that he had gained control of his passion again.

Herron was fooled by the tone into thinking that Daresome had been browbeaten into quiescence.

He laughed, yet dared not look too straight into Dick's clear eyes.

"Answer me!" cried Dick.

"Yes, you're the disgrace of Merrivale," said Herron, in insulting tones. "Your name is a joke on every fellow's lips, and by this time to-morrow you will be bounced in disgrace from the Academy!"

Dick's breath came in quick gasps, with a sucking sound, as he tried to steady himself in his awful ire.

"If that is so I'll leave my autograph on one bright and shining page of Merrivale history," said Dick Daresome.

With the words he caught Herron's shoulders in his two strong, sinewy hands.

He had beaten the fellow enough before. Now he was going to try a different plan.

With the youth in his grip, his action being so quick that the other had no chance to parry the move, Dick began shaking Herron's head and shoulders back and forth.

Has the reader ever seen a rat terrier tire of killing rats in the ordinary way with his sharp teeth, and for very sport start in to shake his victim to death in his jaw grip?

If so, he can have some idea of the picture which Dick's action suggested.

For, with a frenzy which bordered almost on madness, Daresome shook the sneering, deceitful fellow back and forth until his teeth chattered, his eyes rolled and the breath seemed choked out of him.

Nash Clayton and several others sprang forward to the assistance of their friend. But Sam and Chester, Alan Brownson and Skinniman Perkins stepped in between.

"Let them settle it themselves!" cried Skinniman Perkins, the heavyweight of the school.

The manner in which he squared off, with his chunky fists in position for active service, was a splendid argument.

Dick shook his victim with apparently untiring muscles. Herron had been taken unawares by this unusual attack, and in the mad strength of Daresome he now seemed almost helpless, as his head jerked back and forth in that awful terrier-like shaking.

"There, you sneaky, lying cur!" cried Dick. "Go back to your hole and think up some more lies!"

He gave the fellow a shove, and the momentum of the movement landed Herron in a heap on the ground at the feet of his friends.

Clayton helped him to his feet, and the youth glared at Dick with hatred, preparing to rush at the enraged fellow.

But just then the crowd of curious Merrivale lads standing about this tragic scene parted, and a new voice was heard.

"Young gentlemen, what does this mean?" cried the newcomer, sternly.

Dick whirled around and saw the frowning face of the principal.

"He attacked me viciously, and I am not going to be assaulted by any fellow, rules or no rules!" cried Herron, suddenly becoming brave as the roaring lion of the Nubian desert when he scents an easy prey.

As Dick Daresome was facing the principal, Herron rushed behind him and delivered a ringing, stinging blow on the side of the unsuspecting, unseeing youth's ear.

"You coward!" cried Sam.

Dick toppled over to his knees, and the friends of Herron raised their voices in a gladsome cheer. The principal rushed forward, raising his hands for a cessation of hostilities.

Dick Daresome pulled himself to his feet, and dodging under the arms of the principal, swing an uppercut on the chin of Herron which caused that youth suddenly to stiffen out and topple over backward as stiffly and mathematically straight as a tenpin.

"Now I'll take my medicine, after having handed that coward his. I don't hit fellows behind their backs, nor do I lie about them behind their backs, either!"

He turned toward the principal with a pale face, yet fearless and upright, knowing at heart that he had done no wrong nor underhanded act.

"What does this mean?" cried the principal. "I will expel both of you boys for this disgusting brawl here on the day of a holiday and on the steps of the chapel almost. Explain this."

Clayton and another lad were working over Herron, as that lad lay gasping and groaning from Dick's fistic opiate.

"I have nothing much to say," said Dick Daresome, "except that Percy Herron called me a thief, and I won't have my honor besmirched if I have to fight every fellow in this county, and go away from Merrivale on the next train!"

The principal looked keenly at Dick. The lad certainly had no expression of guilt or subterfuge.

"I don't understand all this," said he, slowly. "I received a very puzzling communication from Mrs. Ferguson this morning about you, Daresome, and I would like to talk it over with you. There is more to this matter than I can divine at first sight. Come to my office at once."

With these queer words the principal turned on his heel and started toward his quarters. He ignored Herron, who had risen to his feet with the aid of Nash Clayton.

"You—you—you—" began Herron, in a veritable brain-storm of hatred. He was so angry that he could not think of a word bad enough, mad enough, and insulting enough to convey his feelings.

Dick looked at him with a calm look.

Then our hero walked toward Herron, who stepped back with a barely perceptible shrinking.

"You better dodge back," said Dick, through clenched teeth. "If you utter a word about me after I leave I'll hear about it and I'll hunt you up and beat you within an

inch of your life. There will be two fellows leave this Academy on the same day—and one will be with ill-health!"

He whirled about and started gloomily yet unhesitatingly in the direction of the principal's office.

"Well, I see that the rascals have the toils about me," muttered Dick Daresome. "Yet I will not be a quitter. I will end up game, 'with my boots on,' as the cowboys used to say. I will fight this matter to a finish."

Then he stepped into the principal's office.

CHAPTER X.

RESTITUTION AT LAST.

"Daresome, before I deal with the question of your brawling before the chapel, I want to tell you that I have received a most distressing note from the preceptress of the Girls' Academy. Can you guess its contents?"

The words of the principal rang out to Dick's ears like the death sentence of a judge to a convicted prisoner. He knew his own innocence, yet so tightly did the web of his enemies seem to be drawn about him, that Dick was at a loss for words to express himself.

"I—I—" said he. Then he gulped over a lump in his throat, and could say no more.

The principal studied his face shrewdly. His desk was so arranged that the light fell not on his own face but on that of any one facing him.

Thus he was in the shade himself and yet could study minutely the expression of any one with whom he was conversing in this manner.

It was a clever ruse by which he managed to get a great deal of truth out of all sorts and conditions of students—against their own wills in many cases.

"I believe that there may be some mistake, Daresome," said the official, less sternly. "So far, in your work at Merrivale Academy, you have been honorable and upright. You have won prizes in your class work, and you have been a credit in athletics."

Dick gulped, but again his voice seemed to have gone on a strike.

The head of the Academy continued, as if to draw the lad out of his moodiness. The principal had gentler meth-

ods than most dominies, and consequently better success at governing the typical American lads who came under his rule.

"You have been the right sort so far," said he, "and I have trust in you yet, Dick Daresome. But what is the secret of this mysterious matter? Confide in me, and you will find that I am neither harsh nor unjust."

Dick's tongue was loosened now.

"Well, Mr. Principal," said he, "it's a long story, and first I want to apologize for my ungentlemanly conduct in fighting before your face, and putting your authority to naught. That was wrong. But I claim that in no other way have I been in error."

"Well, tell me all about it then," said the official. "This note asks me to forbid you to enter the grounds of the Academy there, saying that under conclusive evidence you are suspected of having attempted the purloining of several hundred dollars belonging to Mrs. Ferguson."

"Great snarks!" ejaculated Dick, losing control of himself again. "That's the worst thing I ever heard of. Several hundred dollars! It's a foul lie!"

Dick then related the exact truth of the whole matter as far as he knew the details, omitting, of course, his little trip of punishment of that morning.

The principal listened gravely, and at the end extended his hand to our hero.

"My lad," said he, feelingly, "I know honesty when I see it. This suspicion reflects not on you alone, but on Merrivale Academy and its students. I will help you clear this mystery if I can. Anyway, you have my confidence, and I pardon your indiscretion of fighting with Herron. Go back to your room and conduct yourself with quiet dignity. You will find that the truth will come to its own—it is a natural law that can't be defeated."

Dick thanked the principal, and went forth with far different feelings than those with which he had entered the office.

As he clambered up the stairs of the dormitory building he met Sam coming down.

"Hello! you wild-eyed prize-fighter," said his friend. "What did Prince do to you?"

"Nothing," said Dick. "He just told me to go and reflect on my sins." Then Daresome recounted the words of the kindly official, and declared his own determination to work quietly and yet firmly to solve the unhappy riddle.

"Don't worry, old boy," said Sam, smiling over some-

thing or other of great import; "I think you'll have it all cleared up soon. There's a note upstairs on your table which was sent to you by a certain little peach on the Island Orchard. I got one from another peach myself. I think there's good news in store for you, but I dassent break a confidence."

Dick galloped up the rest of the stairs three at a time.

On his table he found a note which a messenger had brought from Bess Morrison. He tore it open clumsy, carelessly, in his hurry to get at the precious sweets inside.

Consequently, as a reward for his haste, he tore the letter in four pieces, but he quickly patched them into place and read the following words:

"Dick Dear: Good news; come to-night and hear about it.

Your loving little sweetheart,

"BESS."

"What can it mean, I wonder?" mused Dick. But he could not imagine any real solution, except that perhaps Bess had a plan to help him.

The afternoon passed very slowly, as may be guessed. Our hero went down to the athletic field, where he whiled away the time as best he could in practice for the Spring baseball work.

Dick had been chosen for the Academy team after severe trials, and now he was busily using his afternoons for practice work with bat and glove.

At last the evening came, and Dick dressed himself for the call on his sweetheart.

"I wonder if I can see her?" thought Dick. "The old lady ordered me never to come again yesterday. Well, a few hours makes a big difference. So I'll just see."

He hurried over toward the Island, taking the short cut over the hill. At supper that evening he had noticed a decided difference in the manner with which he was regarded.

Sam had been retailing over the entire Academy the result of the interview with the principal. Hence the boys felt that Dick was about to clear himself of all suspicion.

And so they gave him the friendliest of looks. Those who were not friendly—that small proportion which resolutely opposed him in favor of Herron and Clayton—looked the other way.

For Dick's display of temper had convinced them that his honor was not a jesting matter with Daresome.

Dick's mood was happy, for some way, as he tramped along the pathway he felt that soon all would be cleared.

He reached the Academy buildings on the Island, and then just as he was about to start up the steps to the broad veranda, his heart misgave him.

"I'd hate to be thrown out of the place in disgrace again," thought Dick. "Maybe Bess meant to meet me outside."

He pondered the matter over again.

Then he decided to walk around the building to regain his nerve and equilibrium.

He softly advanced toward the south wing of the big brick dormitory and turned the corner, walking slowly and thoughtfully. One minute his hopes would be high. Then he was sure that Bess had cleared the mystery up.

The next instant his heart would sink and he would almost start for the distant Merrivale Academy again.

"Oh, Jiminy!" exclaimed poor Dick, "this is a whole barrel of pickles. What shall I do?"

Just then he was passing in the rear of the big dining-room. Through the long French window, which ran from the floor almost to the ceiling of the room, he saw a tall figure moving around.

"By George," thought Dick, "there's old Mrs. Ferguson, who is the cause of all this trouble. Plague take her—I hate these fussy, suspicious old dames, anyway."

As he gazed at the old lady, she leaned over the table to blow out a candle which was the last one burning on a silver candelabrum which was standing there.

"Nothing if not economical," thought Dick Daresome, as he laughed to himself.

But this economy was to cost the old lady dearly, for the thin lace shawl which she was wearing over her shoulders flared up in the blaze from the candle.

Dick gasped in astonishment.

Then he saw the flames spread over the lace and light cloth with startling rapidity.

"Help!" screamed the preceptress.

Dick could not hear her, for the window was closed and locked. But he saw that the unfortunate woman was in deadly peril. One breath drawn into her lungs from the flames about her would mean death!

"Great Scott!" the lad cried in alarm, forgetting all his ire at her now. "The poor woman will be killed."

He leaped toward the long window.

As he did so Mrs. Ferguson endeavored to rid herself of

the burning shawl. Instead of casting it aside she dropped it near her skirts, which were aflame in another instant.

She was by this time a mass of flames, although fortunately she had kept her head away from the deadly breath of the fire demon, and she screamed for aid once more.

A dozen girls came rushing into the room from the adjacent corridor, but when they saw the peril of their preceptress they merely screamed with terror.

Up and down the rooms they ran, adding to the awful melee, but doing nothing.

Dick was struggling with the carefully locked window. After breaking one finger nail, he gave up hope of entering the room in a quiet, orderly fashion.

"This is no time for politeness," thought Dick. "I'll risk the old lady's wrath to save her life!"

With the words, he aimed a kick toward the bottom of the window. His heavy shoe struck the glass just as he had wished, and it shivered and cracked at the instant.

Crash!

Another kick and Dick had cleared a way by which he leaped into the room.

"Burglars!" screamed a girl who saw this sudden and terrifying apparition of a man in the room.

"Shut up!" grunted Dick.

He looked about him for some means of aiding the unfortunate woman.

Mrs. Ferguson, in a frenzy of fear, had rushed out into the corridor by this time, and was in great danger, not only of burning herself to death, but of setting fire to the whole building as well.

"Stop your running about!" yelled Dick, chasing after her. "You only fan the flames that way!"

But the old lady, with a speed which she had not known for years, sped onward, with wild and piercing screams.

Dick pursued her vainly around the lower floor of the dormitory, and the old lady galloped around with increasing speed. Frightened as she was by her awful predicament, the appearance of this masculine invader frightened her out of all her remaining wits.

"Wait until I put the fire out!" called Dick, and at last an idea came to his puzzled mind.

The frightened and terrified old dame galloped through the wide doorway into the music room. Dick was after her, and as he passed he jerked down the portiere with a terrific force.

Rattlety bang!

The pole of the curtain clattered over the floor, and it added to the confusion and terror of the boarding-school girls.

In their panic they had not recognized Dick, and thought that some terrible man had set fire to their preceptress, with the undoubted intention of robbing the school afterward.

Such a piercing chorus of wails and squeals, shrieks and screams has seldom, if ever, been heard since the fall of Rome to the barbarians.

"Wait there!" cried Dick, forgetting all his politeness in his wrath at her foolish spoiling of his plans for rescue.

For her speed and deftness were nothing short of miraculous, as she fled with the blazing garments.

It might have been this very flight, continuous yet zig-zagging, which kept the flame straight out behind her, and prevented them seriously burning her.

However, Dick was now on the trail with the portiere, and it looked somewhat like a bull fight, with one of the fighters trying to wave the flag at the animal, except that in this instant the flagee was speeding continually in the opposite direction.

"At last!" cried Dick, triumphantly, as he managed by a deft turn to catch up with the old lady.

She gave a gruesome shriek, as if all were over, and resigned herself to fate.

"Oh, kill me, and end my sufferings!" cried the terrified lady. But Dick had other plans, as the reader knows.

He whirled the big portiere cloth about her body, and quickly tripped her up, laying her as gently and quickly as possible on the floor.

There, in the twinkling of an eye, Dick did the right thing to save a person with flaming clothes.

He swaddled the heavy cloth about her, rolling the old preceptress over and over, and in a most startling manner quickly smothered the flames.

The girls, who had been shrieking so loudly, now saw that there was method in the pursuit of their teacher.

"Oh, I'm saved!" cried Mrs. Ferguson, rising to her knees to give thanks for her rescue.

Dick stood for a minute in growing embarrassment, as the girls clustered about him.

"Who saved me?" cried the old lady, as she disengaged herself from the clinging cloth of the drapery.

She gazed then at her rescuer and gave an exclamation of unadulterated surprise.

"Why, it's Dick Daresome!" she exclaimed. Then with a queer look she continued. "I thought I forbade you ever coming to this Academy, young man. What about it?"

Dick was embarrassed as the girls about him all laughed merrily and long.

"Well, if I hadn't come you would be a pretty fine bundle of ashes, Mrs. Ferguson, if you will pardon my expressing it that way," said Dick.

This was the only time that Dick had ever gloated over one of his performances.

But this time he was indeed excusable.

"Well, I admit the truth of that, and I want to thank you for your brave deed. When I first saw you I thought you were a robber. But we all owe our lives to you, Dick Daresome."

She started to extend her hand and then stopped.

Dick flushed, for he thought he knew why she stopped, believing, as he did, that she still considered him guilty.

"No, Dick Daresome, I won't ask you to give me your hand until I have received forgiveness from you for a grave injustice which I unwittingly did you."

Dick looked at her in surprise.

Unknown to him Bess Morrison and Grace Gray were standing in the crowd which surrounded them.

"Why—why—" he began.

"I'll tell you why," said Mrs. Ferguson, quickly. "I had intended to write you, but now I would rather ask your pardon here before the very girls in whose presence I insulted you. I have learned to my satisfaction exactly how that purse came there, and how you were tricked into apparent guilt."

"You did!" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes, I know all about it. I know how innocent you are even of wrong intent as well as wrong doing, and I know how the guilty party worked and who he was!"

Dick was thunderstruck.

"I wish I knew as much!" said he.

"Well, I see someone in the crowd here who will tell you," said the old lady, and Dick caught Bess's affectionate glance.

Just then the door-bell of the dormitory building rang. Mary, the maid, went to answer it.

Dick heard the voice of his rival, Stuart Armstrong, the lad whom he instinctively knew had performed all the trickery against him.

"Is Miss Bess Morrison in?" asked the bold Belleville.

"No, she's not!" said Mary.

"Why, I see her!"

"Faith an' yer color blind!" said Mary, with a giggle.

"Well, is Miss Grace Gray here?" asked Armstrong, persistently.

"No, an' she's not!" answered Mary, with another giggle.

"Is Mary Bell in?" asked Armstrong.

"No, an' she's not."

"I would like to see Mrs. Ferguson then," said Armstrong, angrily.

"Faith," said Mary, the maid, "ye do be havin' hard luck, that ye are, fer Oi was told jist this minnit by Mrs. Ferguson to tell the loikes of ye that none of them is here ter see ye!"

With that she slammed the door in his face.

A laugh went up from the girls, and Dick looked at Mrs. Ferguson's smiling face.

"I'm going upstairs to replace these burned up clothes. It's a miracle that I wasn't burned badly myself," said she.

"But I suppose you two want to have a pleasant call. I suppose that little interview at the front door tells you who was the cause of your trouble, doesn't it?"

"You bet it does," said Dick, heartily, "and I think he has been paid back doubly and trebly!"

THE END.

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

"There is no need of sandpaper," said the manufacturer. "It is powdered glass that does the business. That's where the broken bottles go to." He nodded toward an Everest of broken bottles in the yard. "We powder the glass into half a dozen grades," he said. "We coat our paper with an even layer of hot glue. Then, without loss of time, we spread on the glass powder. Finally we run a wooden roller lightly over the sheets to give them a good surface. When in the past they made sandpaper of sand it wouldn't do a quarter of the work that glasspaper does."

For the benefit of the prospective big game hunters a correspondent finally disposes of the theory that a tiger is unable to jump to any height from all fours. He records that he took refuge in a tree from a particular tiger. The beast, however, jumped up to him, "like an india rubber ball, a good seven feet," and it was only "by letting go with my right and ramming both barrels down his mouth that I did not have a very bad time of it." The moral evidently is that when avoiding a tiger it is necessary to find a tree with its lowest branch at least sixteen feet from the ground.

Among certain of the tribes of the Himalayas there is a remarkable custom. The babies are placed on a bed of stones and leaves, covered with a blanket, in such a position that a small stream of water, either from a spring or mountain torrent, plays on the back of the head. This is done from March until the end of November, and the water is often icy cold. The natives say that the plan makes the children strong, and it is looked upon as a cure for many maladies. The children are kept in position under the water for hours at a time, often while they are sleeping, and one woman will mind several children.

One of the last things in the world which one would expect the glassworker to create would be a cannon, yet Messrs. Thomas Webb & Sons, of Stourbridge, England, recently built two cannon out of the finest cut glass. The guns weigh, with their limber, forty pounds each and measure 24 inches in length. They wheel easily and move on their trunnions like ordinary cannon. The axletree and bearings are of ornamental brass. The creations may claim to be of some historic interest in that they are exact models of the famous ordnance with which Major-Gen. Baden-Powell successfully defended Mafeking. The old cannon was dug up in that place during the siege, and investigation has since shown that this old

cannon was cast in Staffordshire at an iron works within ten minutes' walk of the glassmaker's establishment. During the siege the gun was known as the "Lord Nelson" and "Skipping Sally," the officers using the former name and the men the latter.

"Department stores suffer heavy loss by theft every year," said a man on the detective staff of a large local store. "For this reason the management is continually spending large amounts to check leakage, which seems to spring from every possible source. The detective staff has to be changed or modified every few months for several reasons. For one thing, the professional shoplifter who carries away in concealment every day considerable quantities of goods learns to spy out a detective very quickly. For another thing, the petty pilferer who steals because she wants more than she can afford, or the genuine kleptomaniac, are all equally clever in spotting a detective. Then, again, there is the dishonest employee. The clerks naturally soon learn the store detectives. Of course, the examinations are conducted as much as a measure of protection for the honest employee as to discover the dishonest, and there are seldom any objections to this necessary system; but we are looking for new ideas and improved methods all the time, for the quantity of goods that passes unpaid for out of a store in the course of a year is almost unbelievable."

RIB TICKLERS.

Parson—Do yo' take dis man fo' better or fo' worse? Bride-Elect—Lan' sakes, pahson, how kin ah tell so soon!

"Say, Bill," said the burglar to his pal, "this paper says we overlooked a package of bills amounting to \$1,000." "Ain't the depravity of the rich something awful?" replied Bill. "Trying to deceive that way. I seen them bills. They wasn't even receipted."

A small girl, lost at Coney Island, was kindly cared for at the police station until her parents should be found. The matron, endeavoring to keep the child contented, had given her a candy cat, with which she played happily all day. At night the cat had disappeared, and the matron inquired if it had been lost. "No," said the little maid. "I kep' it most all day. But then it got so dirty I was 'shamed to look at it, so I et it."

On a recent railway journey with her husband the wife of a well known M. P. discovered that her umbrella, which had been intrusted to his care, was missing. "Where's my umbrella?" she demanded. "I'm afraid I've forgotten it, my dear," meekly answered the M. P. "It must still be in the train." "In the train!" indignantly exclaimed the lady; "and to think that the affairs of the nation are intrusted to a man who doesn't know how to take care of a woman's umbrella!"

The postmistress in a small town in Lebanon County was strongly suspected of tampering with packages and parcels passing through the office. One day a little boy entered the office and handed her a box containing a large piece of wedding cake, saying: "My sister, the bride, sends this to you with her compliments and would like you to eat as much as you can." The postmistress was delighted. "How very kind of the bride to remember me," she said. "Did she know I have a special weakness for wedding cake?" "She did," the boy replied. "And she thought she'd send you some this afternoon just to take the edge off your appetite before she mailed any boxes to her friends."

TWO FIGHTS FOR LIFE

By Paul Braddon.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIGHT ON THE LAWN.

"You are a young country clown, sir! Out of my way, or I'll horsewhip you!"

The speaker was a man in the prime of life, and he was mounted on a strong hunter, in a country road near a pleasant village in Devonshire, England.

An uplifted whip was in his hand; an expression of anger and annoyance was on his face, and his flashing eyes were bent on a stripling who stood before him on the highway.

That "stripling" was not more than eighteen; he was clothed in humble attire, and his manner and words somewhat justified the richly-attired rider in calling him a "country clown," as he presented an uncouth figure, while his voice was harsh and strong.

The "country clown" held the bridle of the hunter, and he did not seem to mind the insulting remarks or the uplifted whip, as he demanded:

"Where's my sister, Captain Hardy? You must give her back to us!"

A scornful laugh burst from the officer on horseback, as he cracked the heavy whip over the lad's head, and then cried:

"What do I know or care about your sister, you stupid fool? Hands off, or—"

A cry of rage burst from the youth as the heavy lash descended on his shoulder and arm, and the next moment the horse was free.

Another mocking laugh rang out from the rider, as, raising the whip again, he struck the angry youth across the face, saying:

"If you ever intercept me on the highway again, I'll cut you to pieces."

And then Captain Hardy rode on, leaving his victim writhing with pain and rage, and powerless to think, or act, or call out the bitter defiance and hate that was agitating his young heart.

Like one stunned by some cruel and treacherous blow, the "country clown" stood on the roadside, his hand covered with the blood flowing from the cut on his face inflicted by the heavy lash, and his every nerve quivering with passion.

"I'll kill him!" muttered (or rather hissed) the young clown, at length, as he stared after the rider; "I'll murder him if I hang for it, and before he's an hour older."

Bursting with his vengeful thoughts, the youth darted into a wood near by, and then ran along in the direction taken by the rider, as he continued to hiss forth, in savage tones:

"He robbed us of Annie; he's broken poor mother's heart; and he lashed me as if I were one of his own hounds. Captain Hardy, I'll kill you, if I have to follow you to the end of the earth."

Seizing a heavy stone as he ran along, the vengeful youth darted through the woodland path, until he struck out on a green lawn leading up to a substantial mansion.

One glance down toward the gate, and he beheld his late assailant riding towards him, making for his beautiful home.

"He'll pass near me here," muttered the "young clown," as he darted into the wood again. "I'll knock him from his horse; I'll lash him on his own lawn with his own whip; and then I'll be off to the wars. Who can tell but I'll face him as his equal one day?"

On rode Captain Hardy, all unconscious of the danger awaiting him; and thinking only of the fair country girl whose heart he had won.

"Egad," muttered the soldier aloud, "but I'd make her my wife were it not for her clownish connections, and—"

Out from the wood darted the clownish brother; up went the vengeful arm; and then down on the green lawn rolled the gallant soldier, half-stunned by the blow.

"Lash me, will you, you purse-proud villain!" yelled the clown, as he sprang forward and tore the whip from the fallen man's hand. "There now for you—and there—and take that! Oh, but I could murder you!"

"Murder—murder!" yelled a female voice, as a beautiful young girl ran out from the wood. "Oh, William—William, for shame! To beat Captain Hardy, my husband!"

"Your husband, Annie!" gasped the youth, desisting with the whip, and turning to his sister. "Come home to mother, will you? Come, I say, or I'll lash you as—"

"You mongrel cur!" yelled Captain Hardy, as he sprang from the grass and darted at his assailant. "I'll have your life for this insult. Stand aside, Annie. By Heavens, I'll kill him, if he were my own father!"

The slender "country clown" was no match for that athletic soldier, even though he held the heavy riding-whip.

And that whip was soon in Captain Hardy's hand.

"Fly, William—brother—fly!" screamed the young sister. "He will cut you to bits, and then send you to prison! The horse, William—the horse! Oh, Captain Hardy, don't kill him!"

One blow of the whip did William Denver receive; and, though maddened as he was, he felt that it was impossible for him to cope with the powerful man who was cutting at him with all the fury of an enraged overseer on a West India plantation.

But the "country clown" was active and fleet of foot, and he would not give up the struggle while a chance remained, for he was as stubborn as a bulldog.

Springing away from his powerful antagonist, the youth darted for the stone with which he had felled Captain Hardy from his horse, and the next instant the proud soldier was stretched on the lawn, with the blood flowing from his temple.

"Oh, gracious Heavens, you have killed him now, William," cried his sister.

"I hope so," triumphed the brother. "I'm ready to hang for—"

"The people from the hall are coming!" cried Annie. "Oh, William, you will be killed—hung! And think of mother! Fly—fly! There's the horse, and you can escape!"

"Will you go home?" demanded the brother.

"I will—I will! I swear it, William."

"Away with you and me, then," cried the youth, dragging his sister towards the hunter.

In a moment he placed his sister on the powerful hunter, and then sprang up behind her.

One look at the insensible soldier on the lawn, one glance at the excited people hastening from the hall, and William Denver faced the animal down the lawn.

There was a fierce hunt after the lad as he rode across the country; but he was riding the best animal in the neighborhood, and he left his pursuers behind.

Annie Denver was weeping in her mother's arms that evening, and her brother was a fugitive, with the hounds of the law on his track.

Two days after, William Denver was taking a last look at the white cliffs of England, as he stood on board of an outward-bound vessel.

Captain Hardy was a raving, delirious invalid in his own house, with a cut on his temple that would leave a mark there while he lived.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUEL IN THE PARK.

"General Hardy, that is a remarkable scar on your temple. One of your beauty spots from Waterloo, I presume?"

"Yes—no—that is. Oh, hang it, Malcolm; let us talk no more to-night of battles and scars. Fill up the wine, and let the toast be 'Dear Woman.'"

Ten years had passed away since General Hardy encountered William Denver on the lawn at Devonshire, and during that time great changes occurred in Europe.

The great general of the age was eating his heart away at St. Helena; the Bourbon was on the throne of France; and Paris was the center of fashion and folly.

Captain Hardy (now a general) had served with honor in the English army; he had shared in the desperate struggle at Waterloo; and he was now enjoying himself in the gay capital of France, and on the lookout for a young and beautiful wife, in the person of a French countess of note.

On the evening in question, he was dining at a friend's house, and among the male guests were many who had served in the armies of Europe.

Among those guests was a tall officer, bearded and bronzed, who had won distinguished renown in the Prussian service, and who excited much curiosity, as no one could tell of the land of his birth or of his early life.

This guest noticed the dark scowl that passed over General Hardy's face, when Colonel Malcolm alluded to the scar on his temple; and his keen eyes were fixed on the man as they responded to the toast of "Dear Woman."

The ladies of the entertainment had retired to an adjoining apartment, leaving the gallant veterans to enjoy their wine without restriction.

Colonel Malcolm, who was a Scotchman, and possessed all the tenacity of his race, was not satisfied with General Hardy's answer to the inquiry about the scar, and he soon returned to the charge, saying:

"That is not a saber cut, General Hardy, if I am a judge. Fall from your horse—eh?"

"You are very curious about my scar, Malcolm," was the reply. "I'll wager a thousand pounds no gentleman present can tell how I received the scar."

"I'll accept that offer," replied a stern voice, as the tall Prussian officer arose from his seat and confronted the Englishman.

"You, sir! I have not the honor of your acquaintance, and—"

"General Drexel, of the Prussian army, General Hardy, of the English," interrupted the host, introducing the officers.

"I repeat, General Hardy," said the Prussian, as he saluted the Englishman, "that I accept the wager. I will bet one thousand pounds that I name the place, the hour within which you received that scar."

"Tis impossible, sir," cried the Englishman, in angry tones, "unless you are—"

"There is my purse, sir," interrupted the tall Prussian, "and—"

"Here is my sword, sir," cried General Hardy, in a rage. "You offer insult, sir."

"I accept both challenges," said the Prussian, as he laid his sword beside his purse. "But I demand that we take them in order. First, as to the scar. You received it at the hands of a beardless country clown, who horsewhipped you at the same time for stealing his sister from her humble home."

"Liar! slanderer! you will die for this insult!" cried General Hardy, dashing his wine glass at the Prussian.

"Gentlemen, soldiers," cried the host, "I protest against such—"

"Gentlemen, soldiers—men of honor!" cried the tall Prussian, "I swear to you as a soldier that I assert the truth. I am the 'country clown' who felled that scoundrel from his horse, on his own lawn, and then lashed him."

"Tis an infamous falsehood, and I claim satisfaction at once—on the instant!" said General Hardy, as he strode to the door, sword in hand. "Colonel Malcolm, will you do me the honor?"

"Certainly, general," replied Malcolm.

"And my friend, General Wesler, will accompany me," cried the Prussian officer, who was no other than William Denver—the "country clown"—who had entered the Prussian army years before and fought his way to great distinction.

"Let none save the principals and their seconds leave the room, friends," cried the host. "This affair must be kept secret."

"To the park," cried General Hardy, as he strode down the stairs. "I'll kill you, you infernal hound."

"Faith, and you'll have to keep cool, general," replied Colonel Malcolm. "I know the Prussian, and he is a master of his weapon."

"I'll kill the scoundrel!" hissed the angry man. "I'll trample him to the dust."

Five minutes after, the old foes were facing each other in a secluded spot in a neighboring park; and then the clashing of rapiers rang out on the night air.

The deadly struggle had not lasted two minutes, when four ladies could be perceived peeping out through the leaves of a shrubbery near by.

One of these ladies was the French countess to whom General Hardy was attached, and her companion was her maid.

Clash—clash—clash! went the deadly blades, as the stalwart, skillful men put forth all their best points in the life and death struggle, while the seconds and the observers held their breath in suspense.

Ten minutes of thrusts, feints, and parries, and General Hardy was giving way before his more active young opponent.

And then feeling that he must make a desperate effort for his life and honor, the English general made a fearful lunge at the "country clown."

With a brilliant move, William Denver dashed the rapier from his enemy's hand; and the next instant his own blade was thrust in the doomed man's breast, as he cried:

"I swore it ten years ago, and I have kept my word. Mother, sister—behold how I treat the man who lashed the country clown."

"Fool," groaned the dying man, "your sister was my wedded wife. I lied when I told her of the false marriage."

"Thank God!" muttered a voice behind the bushes. "Mother, I can die happy now."

And out rushed William's mother and sister, followed by the French countess and her maid.

General Hardy was conveyed to the house; and he lived long enough to prove his assertion that Annie was his lawful wife.

Six months after, General Drexel, of the Prussian army (alias, Will Denver), married the beautiful French lady who had witnessed the bloody duel in the Park.

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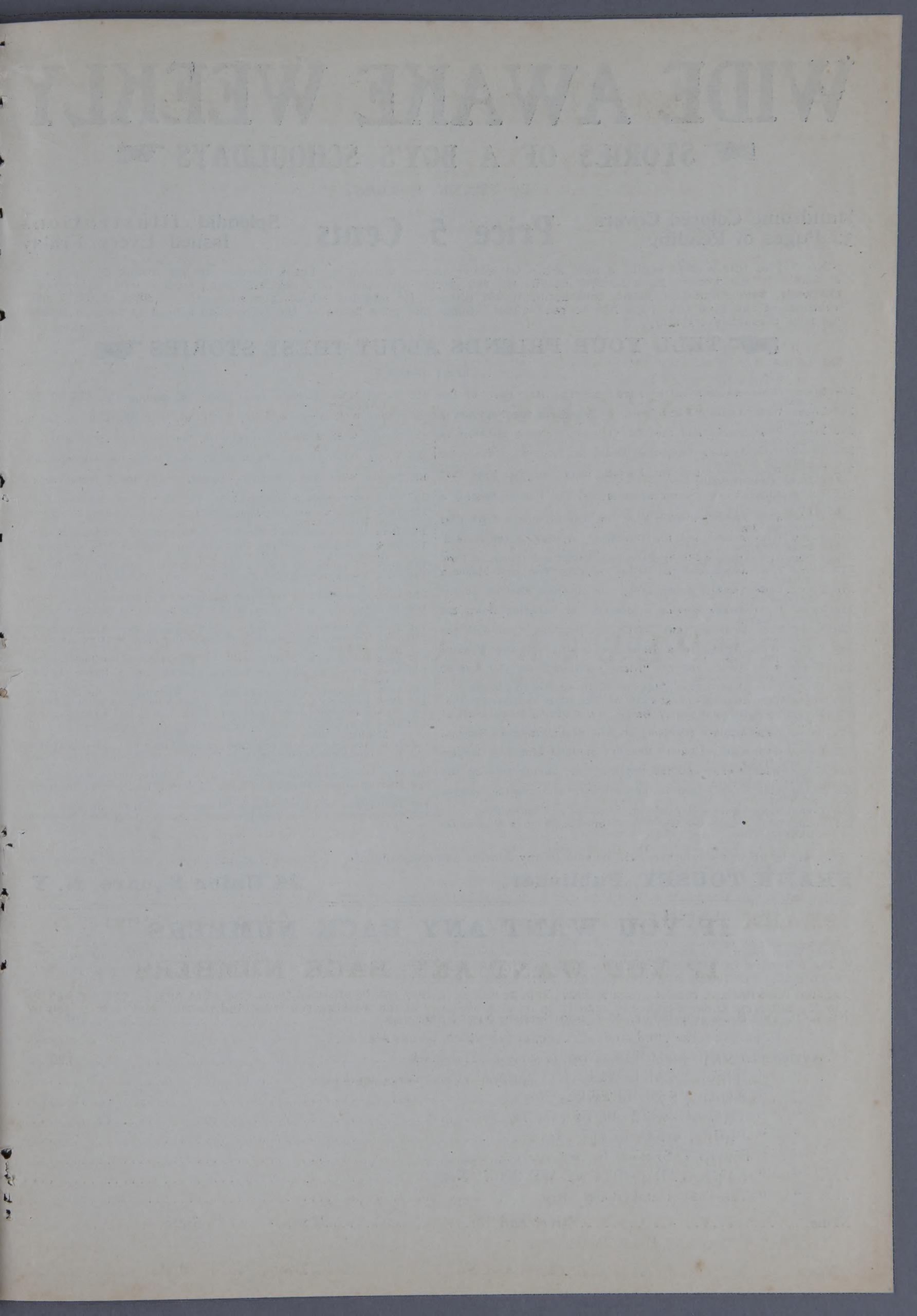
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